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Rose Timson

MARGUERITE STEEN



COLLINS

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ROSE

CHAPTER ONE

HE SAID to me :

"Well, now, Rose, the trouble's over, and we're all clear."

I remember his saying that, although I was not paying much attention. We were having a cup of tea in a little shop off the Strand, and I'd been rather wishing George had made it a port. I'd have preferred a nice glass of port in the corner of a quiet saloon bar, where ladies are made comfortable, but that was not George's way. He was a delicate-minded fellow, with a great respect for the conventions, and it struck me that, in spite of the piece about being "all clear," he was treating the occasion rather like a funeral. I hoped I wouldn't giggle and upset his feelings.

George had a set of nice manners for every occasion, and he had obviously thought this up very carefully; it was a new one on him, but, bless his heart, he wasn't going to put a foot wrong! He had on his best suit and the overcoat I had helped him to choose in the gent's tailoring at Berridge's. Partial to a buttonhole, George was, but there was no buttonhole this morning. A nice, quiet grey tie, and socks and handkerchief to match; very gentlemanly. Poor old George. It's terrible how I remember his clothes, and so little of the man inside them. For George was true blue; make no mistake about that. It still makes me laugh when I think that one little glass of port might have made all the difference: warmed the air, made George not so much of a gentleman, and me not so much of a lady.

George might be sitting beside me now, in the other corner of the Rolls. . . . Wait a minute. If I had married George it 'wouldn't have been a Rolls. It would have been a little place

at Purley or Hendon, with a garage built on, and dear old George coming and going as regular as clockwork, pottering about the garden on Saturday afternoons and going off for his round of golf on Sunday mornings; it would have been a girl for the housework, and me looking after the mending and seeing to the dinner. Well, why not? I'd have fitted into that life well enough—better than George would fit into our lives to-day. And, let's face it: that life of George's would have represented something near paradise to me, on that morning when we sat in The Copper Kettle, down Buckingham Street, drinking china tea and being genteel over hot buttered scones.

The other customers looked at us quite a lot: taking us for married, I expect—George in his best suit, and me . . . well, I dare say I was worth looking at: anyhow from the men's point of view. The funny thing was, women liked me as well; they trusted me. They still do. And women's trust has been worth a lot more to me in the last thirty years than anything I've picked up from the men. I've still got a skin like a baby's, and I have to clip my eyelashes because they get in the way of my glasses, but I haven't got the figure I had in 1912, when I hadn't had my thirty-fifth birthday, and I was still as vain as a peacock of my fine bust and narrow waist. I'd dressed myself carefully that morning, too: a dark blue tailormade—off the peg, but I had the figure for it. I could walk into any shop those days, and the things fitted as if I'd been measured for them. I remember the head saleswoman at Berridge's asking me if I'd ever thought of being a mannequin!—and, believe me or not, I was shocked at the idea. That's the way we were in 1912. I took Kathleen into Le Sage's the other day; there was a royal blue and cherry cocktail outfit that I thought would suit her. The girl showing the gown winked at me, and it was little Valerie Pollock, the Admiral's daughter. Nice child. I'd like to know what her grandmother would have thought of that.

I'd got on a little black hat with dark blue wings and a rucked muslin blouse. I still keep to those quiet styles. When Kathleen wanted a mink coat I gave it her, but I didn't let them tempt me with one for myself. Seal or a smart astrakhan are all right, but you've got to be careful; they'll just swallow the Rolls but it wouldn't do for me to start cutting a dash; people would begin to wonder.

Anyhow, there was I, in my black and dark blue, which brought up my pink and white skin and dark blue eyes, and I could see the women's looks, friendly, half-smiling, thinking to themselves, "That's a really nice woman." It made me laugh inside to think how they'd alter their opinion if they knew I had just come out of the Divorce Court. For divorce, in 1912, was still supposed to be disgraceful. It was all right if you belonged to the fashionable Upper Set—although they were said to be feeling the draught since Queen Mary came on the throne; but the middle classes were all solidly Victorian, especially the woman. One and all, they set their faces against divorce, for the sake of religion, of the home, of the children—any old thing they could think up, that would make them feel safe and justify their behaviour. For when it came to reasoning—well, they didn't. It made no difference if one was the divorcer or the divorcee; the woman who had the courage and the common sense, for her own sake and that of her children, to get rid of some drunken, lecherous pig of a man shared the ostracism of one who was thrown out for taking half a dozen lovers to her bed.

You couldn't blame them. It was—and is still—just a state of society. In a country where there's man shortage, like England, women are natural enemies from the cradle. When a woman gets married, apart from the envy she rouses, there is plenty of good feeling, because that means one less in the competitive ring. But the woman who gets rid of her husband is cheating; instead of being safely locked away inside the bonds of holy matrimony, she's prowling round again, getting in the way of other women who haven't made their kill. It's no use telling them that having once known what marriage is like, one would sooner swallow prussic acid than try it again: and that, if you ask me, is what the average woman feels like, after she has got her divorce. They don't believe it, and they don't want to believe it. And why not? Because women are not fools: because they know that, where men are concerned, a widow or a divorced woman is like a carrot hung before the nose of a donkey. They'll follow it for miles. "The woman with experience": that was the draw in the old days. Of course, to-day, when chits of fifteen know more than I knew after ten years of marriage, it's not the same; and wives, too, are different in these days. But before the last

war, when husbands went roving off, they were generally on the track of some easy-going female, to whom they could tell the funny stories they had to water down for their wives: who liked the company in a bar, and didn't mind a fellow slipping his arm round their waists when they were riding home on the bus. These were the things widows and divorced women were supposed to enjoy, although, if you ask my opinion, a good many only pretended to enjoy it because it was a way of escape from the loneliness and emptiness of their lives. If a woman has been quiet and respectable in her married life, she doesn't alter from the minute the burial certificate is signed, or the decree nisi pronounced. But it's no use expecting a man to understand that.

Well, that is how those nice, friendly-looking women in The Copper Kettle would have thought, if they had known about me. I could picture how their eyes would close down and the corners of their mouths tighten, and how careful they would be not to look at our table as they went out. I would be the Scarlet Woman, and George—I hate to think what poor old George would have been, sitting there as good as gold, remembering his manners, and speaking in a sort of muffled voice, as if the corpse was in the next room! I really hardly dared to smile at him, in case he were shocked; and this in spite of the fact that George knew—none better!—what I had been through in the last ten years. If he had used his brains for a moment, he must have known I was ready to kick up my heels and dance the cakewalk along the Strand! Oh dear, how that would have shocked him—the thought, I mean; so far as the act went, he'd have dropped dead. My imagination was getting too much for me; I had to smother a giggle in my handkerchief, and George, bless him, thought I was crying, and leaned forward, so that other people should not see me. Any other man would have taken my hand, or given me a pat on the knee; but George was always a gentleman. He seemed to have become more of a gentleman since we sat together in the Law Courts and heard the judge read out the absolute. Anyhow, here was I, Rose Timson, free at last, after ten long, miserable years.

I pulled myself together, filled our cups again and passed the muffins to George, who took one reverently. He reminded me of the Chief Mourner, sitting there with his head slightly

lowered, his jaws champing and his face carefully solemn, as if he had been reading a manual on the proper behaviour for getting a friend divorced. I hadn't seen much of him since the case came on, because one has to be careful between the nisi and the absolute, and I knew Harry would just like, out of spite, to trip me up. But my solicitor hadn't seen any harm in his going down with me, as an old friend of the family, to hear the "All Clear." How one slips into modern expressions! The words "All Clear" had no special meaning in 1912, when the Kaiser hadn't started to make trouble, and the lights of Piccadilly showed in the sky half-way to Kensington.

I thought George was looking older, and there were lines round his eyes that you don't expect to see in the face of a man in his middle thirties. Perhaps the business was worrying him. He was a manager of one of the chain stores in our suburb, and did very well, with salary and commission. It must have been difficult for him to get off this morning; perhaps he was worrying about the shop. He asked me what I was thinking.

"It's time I was getting over to fetch the children from Stanley's."

I started to put on my gloves. Stanley is my brother—one of them. They were all horrified about the divorce, of course. I'd had a taste from my sisters-in-law of what I might expect, when I scandalised them by breaking up my marriage. Nora, Stanley's wife, was the most vicious of the lot; I didn't quarrel with her, poor thing; I knew half of it was envy. She hated Stanley, and I think she would have poisoned him if she could have got away with it, but she couldn't face what it would mean to get rid of him by law. Still, they'd got a house at Streatham Common, and it was a good place for the children to go to. Give her her due, Nora was always kind to them, and as determined as I was that they should not know what had happened between their father and me. A thing like that puts a kink into a child's mind, and sets it at a disadvantage among its school friends. That was one of the first things I had to do: find a new school for Kathleen and Jo.

George said:

"But you've not told me any of your plans yet."

"I'm waiting for someone to tell them to me," I was beginning, and then knew I'd said the wrong thing. I could

have bitten my tongue out when George jerked his head up, his face all shining like the full moon, no more funerals about him. It was as if he got outside his best suit, that was strangling him up, and I remember thinking that, considering the sedentary life he led, George was a fine figure of a man, well set up, with broad shoulders and narrow hips, flat back and front and nice straight carriage—the type that would have made a Guardsman, with some army training to tone up his muscles and give him that extra bit of chest expansion that his height required. You couldn't call him handsome, his face was a bit puggy, and there wasn't enough brow to balance the jaw; but all the time the proposal was pouring out of him—I should say, dripping, for George was never fluent, and it was more like a tap that needed a new washer—I was thinking:

"Rose Timson, you must be mad; many a woman half your age would jump at George Glaize"—which, of course, was an exaggeration; I was only thirty-four, and George didn't care for "flappers," as we called them then; but what I had been through had made me feel more than my age, though I didn't look it. It flashed across my mind that this was the sort of thing I might expect for the next few years, if I kept my looks and my figure. Even when I was in my teens, I seemed to be the type that made people think about home and marriage; goodness knows why. Watching other girls enjoying themselves, I used to wonder why I never seemed to get the chance of a good flirtation with nothing serious at the back of it. It was no use; just at the height of the fun, it was sure to pop out. A girl can't be thinking about matrimony all the time. Still that's the way it was, and goodness knows I paid for it.

Well, I let George drip himself to a finish, and by then I may say I was feeling a bit ashamed of myself. I had been letting old George hang around all these years, without the least intention, apart from getting all I could out of him. I don't mean material things—although I did very handsomely at Christmas out of the shop where George was salesman, before he got to be manager of the chain store. There was always a box of sugared biscuits or crystallized fruits for the kiddies and a big canister of tea for me. I was ashamed to accept them sometimes, knowing what a little order ours was, and how the bill went trailing on from week to week. But he

treated me like a gentleman, the same as he treated people who spent ten and twelve pounds a week in the shop. It seems nothing now, when people give me jewellery now and again, or a set of furs, or a fiver's worth of orchids: a woman of my age can take presents of that sort from her gentlemen friends without being misunderstood. They think they owe me something; I bet they do! Perhaps I smile, when I look at young Beetle Curzon's platinum wrist-watch, and remember George's canisters of tea! But it's only kindly; for you were true blue, George, and the salt of the earth; and the Best Indian (that came out of your boss's pocket, not yours) was worth any present I've ever had since.

Besides, George would not have felt it was right to give me presents; it would not have fitted in with his morality. Me, a married woman! The few times he brought me a bunch of flowers, he was careful to explain they had come out of his own garden, and he had really only brought them along to show me how well the sweet peas were doing on that new artificial manure they were running as a special line in the shop.

It would be hard to explain what I really got out of George. We didn't have many opportunities of meeting, and we never got farther than a bottle of Guinness, or an occasional sherry, at the Haymakers, which was a quiet little house kept by a friend of George's. She was a nice woman, and I like to think I've been able to do her a good turn since. She used to let us have her parlour, and we would sit and talk—I expect I did most of the talking—with nobody to spy on us or gossip. And, believe me or not, in all those times we never once held hands or had a kiss. I must have known, in the back of my mind, what George wanted, but I was so sick of everything to do with sex that I wouldn't admit it. Yes, I know what I got from George: the friendship of a decent, honest fellow, who respected my womanhood, and was too unselfish to remind me he was a man.

So when George had finished speaking, I waited a moment, then I said:

"George. If ever you want a housekeeper"—I knew this was a safe one, because he lived with his mother, and when the old lady died, there was an elder sister waiting to whisk him safely out of the way of designing females likes me!—

"I'll come to you. I'll nurse you if you get ill, and if you marry I'll look after your children. But marry you I won't; not you or anybody else, ever again—so help me God!"

It was pitiful to see the light die out of his face, and the way he shrank back into his suit, like a snail withdrawing into its shell. You see, being such a gentleman, it had never occurred to him that a woman could behave the way I had done. I mean, the sort of woman George took me to be: what he would have called a lady. I'd "led him on"; for nearly six years I'd encouraged him to hang after me—neither of us saying anything, certainly, but what are words anyhow? I'd let him see I valued his company, and this, for a simple creature like George, was quite enough. Whatever he expected when he "popped the question" (perhaps at rather an ill-chosen moment), it was not to be turned down flat, without even a word of hope for the future.

I saw the sweat running down his forehead. At that moment I could have taken him in my arms. Looking back, I think it was a mercy we were at The Copper Kettle. If this scene had taken place in the landlady's parlour at the Haymakers, there might have been a different ending, disastrous to us both. For I felt so tender about him that I'd have said anything; I'd have rocked him like a baby, I'd have let him kiss me, I'd have said, "Oh, George, I'll do anything for you—I'll sleep with you if you like—anything, so long as I don't have to marry you." Perhaps this would have been a good thing to have said; it would have destroyed his illusions about me; it would have prevented his walking about for thirty years with me enshrined in his heart, and he might have found somebody who lent herself to the enshrining business better than Rose Timson! I don't know; after all these years, I still don't know. But it still upsets me to think about it, and I never get over the shame I felt at the time, or the way I lost face with myself for my behaviour to George.

There have been a lot of "whys" in my life; questions which have gone on plaguing me and to which still, in my sixties, I have never found the answers. Why, considering all the people who wanted to marry me, did it have to be Harry? I suppose that's a question that about fifty thousand women are asking themselves every day. Why, of all the men I have ever known, did the only one I ever let down have to be

George, whom I loved and respected more than the whole lot put together? There isn't one who wouldn't admit I gave him a square deal—though plenty of them didn't deserve it—except George; and he would knock any fellow down for suggesting that I played him false—which I did. *You know I did, George.* And I suppose I'll pay for it some day.

Well, I did my best to comfort him. I told him I'd make him no sort of a wife, because being married ten years to Harry had given me such a horror, I doubted if I would ever get over it—which was true. It was years before I was what they call "normal," and I've never found any pleasure in it from that day to this. And I told him all the mean things about myself, and how I was deeply in debt, which he knew already; and reminded him that a man with his career to make didn't want to hamper himself with two stepdaughters. And all George said, when I had finished, was: "All right, Rose. I see you don't want me."

I'd rather he had given me a black eye.

We went out into the Strand, and George stopped a taxi and told the man to take us home. I was so upset, I said nothing about the extravagance, and it was only when we were held up by the traffic at Trafalgar Square that it came over me that this was what George had planned: us driving back together as a happy engaged couple!—and even although it had all gone wrong, he was standing by his plans like a gentleman. All the cakewalk had gone out of me by now; I was so miserable, I could have cried; and I clutched his arm and said:

"For goodness' sake, George, don't waste your money. Why don't we have a nice ride on the top of a bus?"

But having given the man his orders, he wouldn't change them. So on we went, and it was one of those old, creaking taxis with the springs gone, that pick up every dent in the paving. We would have been much more comfortable on a bus.

Presently George said: "You'll have to marry somebody, you know. You'll never manage on the alimony."

"I don't mean to," I snapped back at him.

It was very little alimony, much less than my solicitors had wanted me to ask, but I knew it was as much as Harry could afford. A man has to live, and if he couldn't keep it up, it

would be no use suing for back payments. I had worked it out carefully, so that if he kept his job he would have just enough to live on, and what he paid me would about cover the rent and the coal and gas bills. He tried hard to wriggle even out of that, but the lawyers were too sharp, and made short work of the fancy statement he put in, about his earnings.

"Then how are you going to manage?" George was asking. I guessed what was coming; he was working round to lending me some money, and I wasn't having any of that. I had my pride, and I'd treated George badly enough, without putting my hand in his pocket. "Don't be silly, Rose; you and the children can't live on air. You've not only got yourself to think of, you know; there's the kids."

"Oh, shut up! Who else d'you suppose I think of?" And all of a sudden I started to cry. It seemed as if I couldn't bear George, of all people, accusing me of forgetting the girls. I'd already had it from my sisters-in-law, about being a bad mother, and although I knew it was a lie, it was the only thing that seemed able to hurt me. "You should be ashamed to say such a thing, George Glaize, when you know if it wasn't for the girls, my head would be in the gas oven!"

Well, then George was very nice to me, and it seemed quite natural to let him put his arm round my waist and lay my head on his shoulder. Being George, he took no advantage of it; I might have been his maiden aunt for all he showed of his feelings. How different from Harry, who would hate you all the time, but put you down as soon as lay a finger on you. I'd got to the point when even in our quarrels, I wouldn't dare to go the same side of the room Harry was on. So I was in a mood to appreciate George, and like him all the more for the way he behaved himself.

"I haven't worked it out yet," I sniffed presently. "But I give you my word we shan't be living long on the money I get from Harry."

The look he turned on me was so full of consternation that I burst out laughing.

"You needn't think I'm going on town!" I enjoyed shocking him sometimes. "I shan't keep a knocking shop either; that would hardly do with Kathleen and Jo to look after, would it? Besides, though we do our best to forget them, there's my family. No; I promise you that in some perfectly sober, re-

spectable way the family will approve, I'll make more money in the next five years than"—I was going to say, Than you ever made in your life, which would have been a heartless thing to say to George, who was being so kind; and I substituted rather lamely—"than you'd expect."

"I don't see how you're going to do it." George sounded put out. "Even if you go back to nursing, there's no money in it."

"Who's talking about nursing?" I was getting angry with him for being such a wet blanket. "I'm not after chickenfeed! You can take it from me: I'm going to be in the big money! House with servants, a car, holidays abroad—all that kind of thing. And the girls shall have all the things I'd have been able to give them if my father hadn't died and left us without any money."

I don't mind confessing now it was boasting; I knew if I could keep us decently fed and clothed, and the girls at some inexpensive boarding school, it would be about as much as I could manage; the rest was what people nowadays call boloney. But it was the unbelieving look in George's eye that set me off, and once started, there was no stopping me. "They'll go to a finishing school when they're old enough, and learn all the accomplishments. They'll ride and swim and skate and ski in their holidays; they'll dance and meet the right people——"

George was looking at me as if he thought I'd gone mad.

"If those are your ideas," he said slowly, "no wonder you don't want me."

"I'm only joking!"

But actually I was a little drunk with my own words. They talk a lot about inhibitions these days: a catchword that psychoanalysts have pushed into the language. Things you thrust deep down inside your mind, so deep you can pretend they are not there. You go to a psychiatrist and he fishes them up for you, and at first you feel terrible, then you're tremendously relieved, because they have been poisoning you for years. All my inhibitions seemed to pour out of me like a fountain—things I had longed for and pretended I didn't long for, because it was no use—and danced in the air like a flock of butterflies. And it seemed, now that Harry was gone, there was nothing to prevent my catching and keeping them, in all their beauty, for ever. It's a long time since I blushed;

but I can still feel the colour coming up my cheeks, so hot that it brought tears into my eyes. I laughed a bit, because I felt shy, and blinked to keep them from falling. And George laid his hand kindly over mine, and said:

"Well, Rose, I hope you find the man who'll give you all those things. I'm sure you deserve them."

"No, no, George, you've got it wrong," I told him hastily. "There's no man in this; I've learned my lesson, and I don't need to learn it twice. No man will give me what I want for myself and the girls on the terms I have to offer. I've said I don't mean to marry again. That's final. And I'm not going to be somebody's mistress—not because of morality; hell to morality!" George winced, as if I had stuck a pin in him, but I thought, It's good for him to take a knock now and again, and if he doesn't thank me, perhaps his wife will, some day! "Living with Harry was morality, wasn't it? All right; that lets me out. But nobody's going to keep me, because I want my independence. Forget that nonsense I talked!—cars and servants and trips to the Continent. I was just joking. But I promise you in twelve months' time I'll be making a decent living for the three of us, and, after that—well, we'll see."

We were just getting to Streatham Common, and I remembered I had to fetch the girls.

"Put me down on the corner, George."

"What about going round that way and picking the kids up? It'll save you a bus ride home."

"Thank you very much, George; I'd like the walk across the common—and I've got to think up a tale for Kathleen and Jo, about their daddy having gone for a long holiday! Kathleen's a sharp little thing for eight, but thank goodness Jo's a baby; she'll swallow it like a chocolate-drop."

George got out of the taxi first and helped me out. He never forgot these courtesies, but he made a little too much fuss about them: like a person who has been told the right thing to do, but not had much chance of practising it. He stood with his hat off, holding my hand, as if he would have liked to say something, but couldn't find out how to begin. I felt very tender and sorry for him again. Then I wanted to laugh, for I saw he'd got his funeral face back, and he was wondering if he had made a *faux pas* in proposing to me right, as it were,

under the shadow of the decree absolute!—as indeed he had, but who cared? He looked so mournful that if I hadn't been in a hurry I'd have taken him across the road to the Greyhound and stood him a pint of bitter. He'd have spoilt it, of course, by not letting me pay for it, but the brightening effect would have been the same.

However, I hadn't mentioned it to George, but I had to make another call before I went to Stanley's—which reminds me: I wish I could have seen Nora's face if I had turned up there with George. "Losing no time"—"Off with the old"—all the things that don't need putting into words if you've got a regular rubber-face like Nora's. After all, bless her heart, why shouldn't she have the fun of thinking I was a light woman? She's got little enough to amuse her—married to Stanley.

"I'm sure it's all been a great strain," George was saying—leaving me to guess whether he meant the divorce or the proposal. He was doing the strong, silent man very well, on the whole. "I hope you'll have a good rest when you get home."

"God bless you, George," I said. "You're my best friend." I meant it then, and I mean it to-day."

CHAPTER TWO

I SUPPOSE I ought to say something about the events that went before that session with George at The Copper Kettle. I don't want to harp on the divorce, or be vindictive about poor old Harry; they say time is a mellowing influence. Whether it is or not, I've always tried to get bitter thoughts about things or people out of my system as quickly as possible. Bitterness is like bile: it's bad for the looks and the constitution, and if I've managed to preserve myself pretty well for my years, it's as much due to not harbouring grievances as it is to my morning dose of Eno's.

Looking back, I don't remember a single minute when I would have harmed Harry, or even wished him ill. Harry's conditioning was done in his youth, and, as you can ruin a horse or a dog by bad handling, so you can ruin a man.

Sometimes the animal can be gentled back to decency, but the man—never. It seems strange that I, who was such a good judge of dogs and horses, couldn't tell a ruined man when I met it. And, odder still, I believe, if it had not been for the girls, I should still be with Harry, trying to help him, trying to make the best of things. No woman likes to admit she has failed, and there were patches of good in Harry—though I'll allow that, latterly, you had to look for them with a fine comb and a magnifying glass.

I would not talk about my family, except that I always liked the girls to know they had good people on their mother's side. I don't know much about Harry's; he gave me to understand they were gentry, but he always sneered at them, and declared they had treated him shabbily. Except for an uncle, who turned up one night with a bottle of White Horse (or it may have been Haig) in his pocket, and broke the springs of the sofa, I never met any of the Timsons. It's not fair to judge a family by a couple of poor samples, and I always say we are what we make ourselves, but it helps if the material's good.

My father was a veterinary surgeon in the little country town of Crowle. His practice was very well situated, for, beside the hunting people who kept up establishments in the neighbourhood, there were training stables within three or four miles and all around was farming land. The name Lambton of Crowle was a household word in those parts, as you can imagine, and though from time to time other vets tried to settle and set up rivalry, they soon found they had no chance against father's fine record and his popularity with the farming and hunting crowd. Actually, he had more work than he could handle and would have done well to take a partner, but he was waiting for one of the boys to come into the business, instead of bringing in another name which would carry less weight with the clients. As a matter of fact, my sister Laura and I had more instinct for the work than any of his three sons, but in those days—back in the 1890's—no one had ever heard of women veterinaries, and not only mother, but father himself, would have been shocked at the suggestion.

The little town of Crowle is typical of many you will find in the rural South of England. There is the wide High Street, faced up each side with old red brick houses—the Georges, William and ~~one of two~~ even going back as far as

Queen Anne: each one a little bit different from its neighbour, showing in the design of a porch, or the setting of the windows, the tastes of the people for whom they were built, yet all in the same dignified tune. Each had its own face, its decent, self-respecting personality; in fact, they were so like persons to me that, walking up the High Street, I'd instinctively twitch up my stockings and feel if my skirt were straight, just as one did going into church.

In those days they were nearly all private residences, except Dr. Lever's, about half-way down on the left towards the market, and Mr. Hurcott's the solicitor's, next but two on the same side; and, more or less opposite, the bank, where father went on Fridays to take a glass of sherry with Mr. Runcorn and draw the wages. Now they're antique shops and insurance companies and rates-and-taxes; Mr. Hurcott's is The Buttercup Tea Rooms, and the very handsome double-fronted house next door—I forget whom it belonged to—a youth hostel. It is good for young people to live in beautiful surroundings, but I doubt whether any of those girls with their bottoms sticking out of khaki shorts and the youths with greasy hair notice the Georgian architraves, and I hear they've ruined the panelling.

They've taken out the ground floor fronts of seven or eight of the houses and put in plate glass; there's a radio shop, a branch of one of the London furnishing stores, and I'm told there's going to be a Woolworth's. It hurts me, every time I drive through Crowle. There's got to be progress, but progress isn't taking a beautiful old house and cutting it about. I can feel the knife every time I look at those old rose-coloured bricks and remember the little bow windows curving out on the cobbles, and the flights of steps, gently hollowed out in the middle of the treads, that led up to handsome front doors between the fluted pillars.

In my day there were a few little shops, but they fitted into the design, with their small-paned windows, bow fronts and the nice scrolled lettering in gilt over their doors. There was an old fellow called Badgert who used to do all the lettering; very critical of his work he was, and if he was not quite pleased with the way it had gone, he would call round, weeks or even months later, take it all out and do it again, without charging. The last sign he ever painted is up still, very faint and almost

illegible, over Pumphrey's the chemist's: the only one of the old fronts left on the High Street, a relic of times when a man took pride in his work, because he was his own master, not the slave of a union.

Whenever I want to feel happy, I remember the High Street on a summer morning, when the shadows of the plane-trees dappled the pavement, and sunlight came dancing off brass knockers and door handles; and there was the hot smell of wallflowers from the window-boxes and fresh bread and sugar buns from Almond's the baker's. I've seen country towns in France, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Germany and Holland, but I've never seen anything so sweet and wholesome as Crowle in my girlhood's days. (I wouldn't insult Crowle by comparing it with any of the Latin countries; I never came back from Italy or Spain without feeling I wanted a good carbolic bath.) I don't know if it's my imagination, or if the people were just as wholesome and sweet as the place, but that's how they seem, looking back.

Our house stood—still stands—just on the crossroads, where they have brought in the new by-pass. It was one of the newer houses—Early Victorian: a square, stucco place with a big porch and a glass conservatory built out over it, set well back on its carriage sweep, with three cedar trees, flat-topped, like Chinese umbrellas, between it and the wall that faced on the high road. Father bought it for the stables, which were just what he wanted for his business, though it cost more than he should have afforded and was too large, even for our biggish family; and he had his office, dispensary and surgery, kennels and loose-boxes, beautifully kept, and a model of what such places should be. He was as particular about his dispensary as a doctor with human patients; in fact, a few used to say they were surer of Lambton's bottles than they were of Dr. Lever's, which, of course, was just friendly prejudice.

We children grew up in an atmosphere of love. That was mother's doing. Father would have been fonder of us if we had been horses or dogs—not that he was ever anything but kind and jolly with us. It was just that he could not see that human animals were as important as beasts. There used to be a tale of how mother went out and asked father to look after Stanley, who was then a baby in his cradle: and how she came back and found Stan bawling, with a lump the size of a

hen-egg on his head and the cradle on top of him, while father was giving a puppy a dose of bismuth for wind on the stomach. Mother never trusted him with us after that. He meant well, of course; we were always being blistered for our sprains—which was hard on mother, who disapproved of it, and on Ozzy, who had a very tender hide (like a girl's, they used to say) and his blisters tormented him for weeks; and I had a course of condition powders (Small Dogs, Cats and Puppies) because the Spring had brought me out spotty—but that happened to do the trick. There was always a kind of friendly rivalry between father and Dr. Lever, where we children were concerned, that kept poor mother on the jump; she swore he would poison us one day.

She was a wonderful woman. Considering her family, and the domestic help she had—or hadn't—she kept her home beautifully. She said people had no business to live in a good house and not respect it. It had belonged to a rich old maiden lady, and when father bought it, some of the snobs were shocked. Mother set out to show them that a vet knew as much about living in a house like The Cedars as old Lady Sophy Gibbs. We hadn't a butler to open the door, but the village girl that mother sometimes forgot and called the housemaid (her people had kept servants) did not do badly. We had a cook, too, but she was only rough, and when there was company, mother did the cooking. There were so many rooms we could keep a couple more or less presentable, and we children could make our mess and litter over the rest; and of course there was always a homesick bitch or a delicate puppy or two that mother rescued from the kennels, because she said they needed special coddling. Her love extended to every sort of living creature, and father often called in her unprofessional help over a difficult patient. And in spite of all this, old Lady Sophy wouldn't have grieved for her paintwork or her parquets if she could have seen them while we lived there.

I don't suppose father ever realised the burden he laid on mother by his hospitable habits. He was always asking people to stop to midday dinner or supper, and he would often not be there himself because he had been called away, so mother would have to entertain them: which was not easy, as they were generally men she hardly knew at all, and as they were expected to stop until father came in, she would have them

on her hands, sometimes, for half a day. Then father would arrive and shout for his meal, and insist on their sitting down again and sharing it with him—which meant they all settled down to drink whisky, for naturally people—even farmers—who have just had a good three-course lunch did not feel like starting all over again. And it would be time to lay supper before the table had been cleared, so the servant was in a temper, which was a thing that father, being a man, never considered. Yet I never once saw mother ruffled, and she never took it out in sharpness with us, as many a mother would have done. And we were a handful, believe me. Mother was just a natural lady; I never met one since, titled or otherwise, that was fit to clear her shoes. I've done my best to remember her, with Kathleen and Jo; but you have to have something special . . .

We were very happy children. I don't think we quarrelled much, although Stan, who was the eldest, was the difficult one. I once heard mother say to father that he hadn't a loving heart, like the others, and God knows time has shown she was right. Laura and I used to feel guilty about Stan, because it seemed wicked that we should not care about him the way we did about our other brothers. I remember once finding Laura kneeling beside her little bed, her stiff pigtail sticking out with a blue ribbon on the end of it, praying: "Please, God, do make me *love* Stanley, even if I can't *like* him!" He had a kind of sneaking, sneering way with him that frightened the younger ones, and he was cruel to animals. Father once nearly took the hide off him because he caught Stan tormenting a cat of ours that was going to have kittens; but I'm afraid it made no difference, except that he was careful not to be caught again. You could feel cruelty oozing out of him, even when he was a boy. I don't blame Nora . . . except for marrying him.

I was next to Stan, then Laura, then Alfred and Ozzy; a year between each of us, then two years to Oswald. We younger four were good friends, though Laura and I, being girls, perhaps were closest. We had our ponies—three of them, between five of us: the one I called mine was Snowberry, a little white Exmoor whom I shared with Ozzy, because he was thin and light, and I didn't like to see Snowberry weighed down by Laura's fat body or Alfie's straddling limbs. If Stan

had laid a finger on her I think I would have taken my cosh to him.

Nobody but Stanley rode his cob; there was something shifty about it, that we blamed on Stan, not on the pony. Laura and Alfie shared the piebald, Prince, who had come from a circus, and was much the best, as well as the cleverest, of the three; but I loved my Snowberry, and our greatest treat was when father took a couple of us riding out with him to the farms, where they made a fuss of us because we were Lambtons, and gave us farmhouse pie and curds and whey.

I don't suppose every day was picnics and parties: apple-gatherings, strawberry-and-cream in the hayfields, Fifth of November bonfires and dressing up the Christmas tree. But, looking back, those are the things that come to my mind, and I realise that mother never let us miss one of these treats which make up the total of a happy childhood. I never lived in the country for years after my marriage, so Kathleen and Jo never knew what it was to cut turnips into lanterns, to look in the hedges for Easter eggs, to bob for apples or make up plaits and rosettes for the ponies to wear in the May Day processions. I wonder how many children still do these things?—or what children of to-day would make of our games with conkers; of Laura and me sitting for hours, lining walnut shells with bits of velvet to keep our thimbles in, making dolls'-house goblets out of acorn cups or stringing beech husks for necklaces? It seems to me that the only things children care about nowadays are things that come out of shops, imitations of grown-up things, ready-made ideas, instead of things of their own invention.

Mother took great pains with Laura and me. When we were quite small, we were sent away to boarding school, for she said we were getting too rough and tomboyish with our brothers. We had quite a good time, when we got used to it, although we were both dunces, and always at the bottom of the class—which amused father and upset mother, because she had a great respect for education and wanted us to be brought up like ladies. However, we were both popular, because, I suppose, we had learned plenty of give and take from the boys. Laura was fairly good at drawing, and brought home some pencil copies of the art master's landscapes, which mother, poor dear, had framed for the parlour; and at the end of five

years I could more or less play a piano setting of "In the Gloaming, O my Darling," and vamp to father's country songs. So I suppose they thought the money was not wasted.

In the holidays mother started to be very particular about our friends, and arranged tea parties for us, which I am afraid she enjoyed more than we did, for we thought most of the neighbours' girls were a dull set. The surgery and kennels had always been strictly forbidden to us children, except by special permission, although, as Alfie grew older, he was sometimes allowed to help the kennel lads, and he was supposed to be going into the business after he had passed his examinations and got his diploma—which, of course never happened: but that comes later.

We never heard any of the coarse conversation that went on between father and some of the rougher customers, and, extraordinary as it may seem, although Laura and I were daughters of a vet., neither of us knew anything about how babies were born until—I was going to say, until we were grown up; but Laura did not live to grow up, and it never struck me until many years later that she died all in what people call the beauty of innocence. Sweet, pretty Laura; this story would be a different one if she were with us to-day.

But what I was about to say was that, contrary to what people tell you, children do not associate the antics of animals with anything that happens between human beings. We kept rabbits and guinea-pigs, and understood that when the buck climbed on top of the doe we might shortly get the breeding boxes ready; but we never applied our knowledge to our own race, and when Martha, our "housemaid," surprisingly began to swell in front, and was most obviously going to litter, we were baffled; first because she had no husband, and second because we could not imagine how she ever got into this state. And when mother got rid of Martha, as a respectable lady was suppose to do in those days, we were even more mystified, and discussed it together, although we were much too self-conscious to mention the matter to mother.

Of course, she wouldn't have told us if we had. Mother's generation never did; they sent their daughters to the marriage bed without a word of explanation or warning, because that was what the husbands expected. I have never understood why

mother, who was so frank and so natural about a whelping bitch, took refuge in disapproving silence (at least in her daughters' presence) at the slightest reference to a natural human process. But it taught me my lesson, and I saw that Kathleen and Jo were informed when they were still quite small.

If, however, mother failed us over this, it was her only weakness. Many a time, for the girls' sake, as well as my own, I have wished she was alive: to hold her two little granddaughters on her knee, teaching them their "Gentle Jesus" and humming them off to sleep with "Abide with me"—the old tune, not Clara Butt's fancy version: "Sleep softly in this quiet room," "Golden Slumbers," "Poor Shepherd Boy, 'tis time to leave the mountain"—all the sweet old lullabies that were woven into the pattern of our childhood; it used to grieve me sometimes, that Kathleen and Jo were missing them all. I taught them "Our Father," and told them always to say it before they went to sleep; but somehow it wasn't the same. I knew that, when I listened to them pattering it off. I hadn't got that quality of mother's, that simple goodness and reverence, that brought the spirit of God into the room when she came to bid us good-night. Yet I never remember her talking religion to us, and I sometimes think it wasn't the prayers she taught us, or the hymns she sang, but the way she held us in her arms, so that loving God and loving mother were part of the same thing. She never let us go to bed miserable or angry, and whatever trouble there had been during the day, we always knew, when it was getting near bedtime, that it would straighten out, and Gentle Jesus and mother between them would take it over and leave us happy to drop off to sleep.

We all went to church on Sundays, and took our bunches of flowers to the Children's Service, and perhaps in the evening she would read us a Bible story—just to make a difference between Sunday and the other days of the week. The only time she ever did anything which seemed "religious" was when we were confirmed—Stan and Laura and I at the same time: when she called us into her bedroom, and, looking almost shy as we felt, said she would like us all to say a prayer before going to church. I wish I could remember that

prayer, but girls of fifteen are heedless, and I am afraid I was thinking more of my white dress and my long net veil than of the solemn occasion.

Mother must really have loved and believed in God. I say it with wonder to-day, but I think I did too, up to the time of my marriage, but, I suppose, just in the rather light and thoughtless way of a girl of that age. I wish I had had this to give Kathleen and Jo, because I think it's good for little children; it makes them feel safe. Well, I've tried to make up in other ways.

I have written all this because it shows the kind of life I wanted for the girls. Perhaps you might not think it, from the way things have turned out, but these were the things at the back of my mind when I got rid of Harry. I wanted to get them away from the sordid kind of life we were obliged to live, and I had begged and implored him to help me, but it seemed as if he just couldn't make the effort. Although, give him his due, he was very fond of Jo. But not fond enough to stick to his job and give up his bad habits and make a decent home for us. I had actually begun to be frightened of losing my own standards, such as they were; it's terrible how soon you can slip into another person's ways, at first without noticing, and then because it's too much trouble to stand out for your own. But when Harry's example started to show in Kathleen, who had been as true and honest a little girl as Laura when she was tiny; and when Jo picked up some expressions that would have killed her grandmother, if she had heard them, I knew I must not shilly-shally any longer, and I told Harry I was going to see the lawyer.

Here I am breaking off one part of my tale and starting on another before I have finished. I want to get the Crowle part out of the way before I start on the real story, and I will do it as shortly as possible, because it hasn't, like the first part, got much to do with the girls.

As every one knows, big Victorian houses and ponies and school fees run away with plenty of money. When I was seventeen, Stan was still hanging around, unable to make up his mind about his career; Laura and I were young ladies with admirers of our own, which meant smart frocks. Mother would, I think, have been economical, but father, who was now very proud of us, would not have us stinted, and I

expect we had plenty of criticism from people who thought the Lambton girls were ridiculously overdressed. Laura was lovely, with her bright pink cheeks and bright chestnut hair, and nothing delighted father more than to have her beside him when he went his rounds in the dog-cart. He could never have enough compliments about "that stunning daughter" of his! He usually let her do the driving, for she handled the ribbons beautifully, and this gave him all the more chance of leaning back and basking in her glory. Young as we were, we both had several proposals, but most of Laura's admirers were out for lighthearted flirtation, while mine already showed that trying tendency I have mentioned—to get down to serious business from the start. It was beginning to make me nervous of encouraging any new young men.

Alfred and Oswald were still at school, and doing rather better, fortunately, than their sisters. Their bite out of the family budget was a relatively small one; what actually ate up the funds was father's increasing extravagance at home.

He was certainly, at that time, in a very good position for a man in his profession, but no veterinary's fees could have covered the standard on which he now insisted on our living. When mother protested, he teased her jovially, by saying he would get it all back in a couple of wealthy sons-in-law. In actual fact, he was so popular, for his good looks and his good manner, as well as for his skill in his profession, that several people who would ordinarily have looked down on a vet, and kept him in his place, went out of their way to court his society. Nothing would do for father but inviting them to the house, and although mother demurred, and said he was inviting a snub, he pooh-poohed her, and said that while he had three beautiful women to run his home, there was no risk of snubs! And so it appeared, for nobody refused our invitations, although I dare say a few smiled on the quiet, and said that Lambton was "getting too big for his boots."

And all this, of course, meant extra work and responsibility for mother, although father had insisted upon engaging a proper cook and "doing things in style." He had style on his brain, for it was about this time that he started dropping in at sales and picking up anything which took his fancy and would look well (to his ideas) in the hall or dining-room. Once it was a three-tiered *épergne* in gold plate, that made

the table silver look so shabby that he had, of course, to go off and buy a two hundred piece canteen that had been in Westrupp's shop as long as any of us could remember; and once, believe it or not, it was a great stuffed bear standing on his hind legs and holding out a brass tray for visiting cards. As if any of our friends left visiting cards. However there was a party for the *épergne* and another for the bear, and of course we girls had the time of our lives. In one respect only it was like the old days; when a mare is in premature delivery, she does not stop to inquire if the vet is having a dinner party. So off father would go, and Laura and I would carry on with "In the Gloaming" and "Clementine" and the rest of our little repertory! It seems very quaint and simple now, but we thought we were living in a whirl of gaiety. Mother used sometimes to say that unless father took care, people would start saying that Lambton didn't take his work seriously, but I don't think she was right, for no matter what fun was on, hunt ball, farmers' dinner, or a party at home, he never neglected a call, and Bert, the head kennel lad, who was on duty when father was out, had strict orders to saddle the mare and bring him every message, however trivial; and I have known him leave a gathering half a dozen times in an evening just to keep an eye on some patient whose condition did not satisfy him.

Of course, this mixture of work and play, and the hours he kept—for even when he did not go to bed until three or four, he was in the office by seven, getting the reports, inspecting quarters and planning out work for the day—in time took toll of his constitution, and for some time now he had been a very heavy drinker. It was father's misfortune that he had a head like a rock; nobody ever saw him the worse for drink, and I have since been told that on the top of a drinking bout that would have laid any one else under the table, he would pick up one of his instruments and perform a piece of surgery as skilfully and delicately as if he had never tasted anything stronger than a glass of beer in his life. But for three or four years he must have been burning himself out; his skin had lost that clear, healthy glow, sometimes he was the colour of an over-ripe plum, and he had put on weight round the middle that, in a man of his age and habit, means liver. We heard

afterwards that Dr. Lever had given him many warnings, but you don't catch a man intent on enjoying life to the top of his bent, like father, accepting warnings.

It was Laura's death that finished father—and, in a way, finished us all.

When he said he was going to buy her a new horse, even I protested. Heedless as we were, I think we had both begun to suspect that things were getting—well, not desperate, because nothing was ever desperate with father; but perhaps mother's troubled look, and her oft-repeated warning that we would soon have to "draw in," frightened us a little. And, nice and polite as the trades-people were, Laura and I, who now did most of the shopping, could not help being aware of a coolness. One morning Mr. Harding the butcher followed us out to the trap, to say, "Excuse me, Miss Rose—but you didn't happen to forget that envelope for your mamma the other day, did you?" "Of course she didn't!" cried Laura, flushing up and tossing her head as she touched up the cob, which was now too small for Stanley and had been broken into harness. "What impudence!" she said, when we were trotting down the street; but we knew the tradesmen could not help sending in their bills, and we had guessed, from the fatness of Mr. Harding's envelope, that his must be a shocking one.

Of course, our protests were just what father needed to make up his mind. Laura had her new horse, and a new riding habit as well. Proud as Lucifer, father took her with him when he went over to the training stables. Old Mr. Apple-gate, the trainer, a great admirer of Laura's, insisted they should try the new horse round the gallops. It was one of those treacherous Spring mornings, with a thin wind under the sunshine. Laura got very hot, and caught a chill, waiting for father. A week later she was dead.

It was after Laura's death that father took steadily to the bottle. He had always been what is called a happy drinker, enjoying it as much for the company he drank with as for the liquor itself; and then of course he used to have his odd glass to ginger himself up—"a hair of the dog." But now he soaked steadily, not troubling to crack his little jokes that were meant to excuse him to mother, when he got out the

third, or perhaps the fourth bottle in a day. About a month after Laura died, he had the stroke from which he never recovered.

I suppose I could have got married straight away; but I wasn't in love with anybody, and if I had been, I don't think I could have left mother, with the boys and all father's debts on her hands. We were able to sell the practice, of course, but the man who bought it did not want the house, although he made an offer for the stables. We were advised that the value of the house would depreciate, with a veterinary establishment actually in the grounds, and it was obvious that any one who bought a house the size of The Cedars would want to keep their carriage and pair, as Lady Sophy had done. So that meant we did not get as much as had been agreed for the practice, as the purchaser pointed out that the premises were included in the goodwill; and we were left with the big place on our hands, which so frightened mother that she lost her head and finally accepted a much smaller offer than she should have taken, just to be rid of it.

I always felt that Mr. Hurcott, who was our solicitor, should have looked after mother better, and not let her do something which was so much against our interests; but there are always wheels within wheels. Mr. Hurcott's wife had been jealous of "the Lambton girls," having daughters of her own who, poor things, were not much of a success socially. I expect she poked her nose in and would not let Mr. Hurcott do a lot of the kind things he would surely have done, for father's sake, if he had been left to himself. If a decent man acts in a disappointing fashion, *cherchez la femme*, I say, every time. It's a funny point of view. I would always want a husband of mine to act kindly and generously, for the sake of my pride in him; but this never seems to strike some women. If they only saw that by encouraging their men to behave meanly, they were belittling themselves, I'm sure they would take a different view of it.

Well, we got the money, as much as it was; and when the debts were added up and the cheques written in settlement, we found we had nothing left to live on.

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN I left George on the corner, and set off to walk across the Common, I felt more cheerful than, perhaps, I'd the right. At last, after ten years, I was a free woman, and it felt like taking off a pair of smoked glasses and seeing things and people in their true colours for the first time since I was married. I wonder if other people feel the same way: that when you are blithe and happy, all your senses sharpen—colours seem brighter and shapes more clear-cut and satisfying on the eye; you're quicker to pick up a scent or a sound, and you get a funny little, singing pleasure out of things you never notice when your mind is all knotted up with worry.

I looked ahead, at the nice, long slope of the common, with trees dotted here and there, and there was just enough air moving over the grass to ruffle up the foliage, the way a hen's feathers are ruffled when the wind gets behind it; then the breeze would drop and the beautiful solid shapes of the branches would remould themselves, green and steady against the slowly moving clouds. It was mother who taught me to love trees; if she had had her way, there would have been nothing but trees and grass in the garden, but father had to have his sealingwax-red geraniums, and lobelia, and calceolaria, "for show."

I walked across the Common, pretending it was a beautiful private park where the children could roll and play and ask their friends to come and play with them—just as we children had done at home: with Snowberry to come trotting round the trunks of the chestnut-trees, and pink and blue ribbons in her mane that flapped up and down like a little rocking horse. I could hear Jo call, and her answering whinny, and see the pair of them up on her silvery back, galloping over the grass, with her little hooves beating the hard, summer-dry earth and raising little puffs of dust each time they struck a bare patch.

A kind of ache came over me, to remember that Kathleen and Jo had never known any of the real loveliness of childhood: its freedom and its security, and all the adventures

children invent and the imaginary dangers they pile up for themselves. They had only known mean streets and paving stones and little backyards crowded with the sordid rubbish for which there is no accommodation in poor people's houses. They had never known that education of the eye which, honestly, was the only education Laura and I had ever managed to pick up—in spite of our expensive boarding school—and they had never had so much as a kitten or a puppy to fondle, because in our kind of district the poor little beasts were bound to get run over or stolen, and it was asking for trouble, just to try and keep one.

When I got to Alice's, there she was, by good luck, just putting her key in her front door.

"Why—Rose!" And she stood there smiling, with the door wide open behind her. We didn't kiss, or shake hands, or anything; when I walked into Alice's house it was like walking into my own.

I've had two good friends in my life: George and Alice. Plenty more, of course, for I've always been one to make friends, especially with my own sex. Yes, I like women best, though I see all their weaknesses; perhaps that's what makes me like them. I feel sorry and want to help them, or I admire them for the way they get away with it; and, above all, do I take my hat off to their courage! I'm not a feminist, and I never went in for the vote racket. What do women want in Parliament any way? Let the men make up the laws, and if we can't find our own way of getting round them, we aren't worthy of the name of women! But I am in a position to know what I am talking about when I say that, morally and in some ways physically, women are the strong sex. They know it, and perhaps that's what makes them so soft and silly with the men; it's their chivalry makes them that way.

George and Alice were my best friends, because they knew me at what you might call my lowest ebb. I always knew I had only to go to them—and, of course, knowing that, my silly pride made me hang back until things were, perhaps, worse than they need have been. But getting rid of Harry had helped me to get rid of some of that false pride of mine, and this time I had made up my mind to ask Alice straight out for her help and advice, since it was quite certain I could

not start out for myself and the girls on my own little knowledge.

At the time of which I am speaking, Alice had been married seven or eight years. The year after their marriage, her husband met with an accident which left him completely paralysed in his legs. He was insured, of course, and I think they drew quite a good sum on his policy, but there was no question of their being able to live on it for the rest of their lives; so they talked it over, and agreed, not very willingly on his side, that, as Alice was going to be the breadwinner in future, part of the money should be spent in giving her a training.

One of the things that make Alice a good friend is that she's a good listener; she never interrupts, or tries to drag in her own affairs, as most people do; she never lets you feel she is in a hurry, or that she should be doing something else. That is how it is, I find, with busy people; it is the idle ones who are always in a fluster and a flurry, pretending they have twenty things to do but doing none of them. Alice never looked at the clock; she just sat there, as quietly as if I hadn't upset her plans for the afternoon (she must have had them, for Alice is not one to waste a minute), and although my mind was all set on my affairs, I was not so self-centred as not to think how good she was to look at, with her beautiful pale skin and red lips, her soft straight hair parted in the middle and done in a plain knob on the nape of her neck—a style that was unusual in those days—and her serious eyes, rather dark for the rest of her colouring, and made more striking by her black brows and lashes. She had a beautiful figure, too—rather full, but slim-waisted and straight backed; and there wasn't an unhealthy speck in her from head to foot. A beautiful, flawless fruit she was, the kind born for motherhood, and I often felt it was a tragedy that Alice was tied for life to a man who could never be a husband to her. I knew she was as good as gold, although she had not a cold nature, as I begin to think mine must have been, and she had a way of looking at a man which would make him ashamed of anything he happened to have in his mind.

"Well, Rose," she said, after I had finished, "I don't know what to say, I am sure."

From some people that would have been discouraging, but not from Alice, who was never one to come out with some facile solution of other people's troubles, and I could tell from the kind of inward look in her eye that she was thinking of something. So I just gave her a smile and waited. Alice and mother had the same quality; they made you feel you could depend on them.

Then she did an odd thing, for Alice; she was leaning forward with her elbows on the table, and she unfolded one arm and reached out and picked up my hand, which was lying in front of me. As a girl I used to have nice hands. Now I was ashamed of it, as Alice took it in hers, and looked at the broken nails, the rough cuticles and little shading of grime in the knuckles. It wasn't dirty; it just looked what it was, a neglected hand, which might have been good-looking, and was not: which is worse than a hand which is so ugly that its owner can't take a pride in it.

"I've not had much time for manicure lately," I excused myself; but Alice did not seem to notice. She was lifting the fingers, one by one, and twirling them slowly round, as my music master used to do, when I was learning to play the piano.

"You see, your certificate isn't worth much, because it's so long since you practised."

I should have mentioned the certificate before, especially as it is the only one I ever gained in my life. But I got tired of writing all about ourselves after father died, and it did not seem worth while to mention that, after we left Crowle, and Stanley got an office job, and Alf and Ozzy had to leave school and start to earn their living in ways that neither of them cares to remember—I went into a cottage hospital, which is where I met Alice, got some sort of a training and was given some sort of a certificate. I qualify it like this, because you must remember that, in the days I am speaking of, round about 1900, training was much less specialised than it is now, and it was easy to get qualifications which, nowadays, mean a long course of study and practical experience. In 1900 I was twenty-two, and I'd just taken up midwifery when I met Harry and got sidetracked—although we weren't married for another two years. You see: it wasn't even a whirlwind wooing. It was just the bone-headedness of a girl too stubborn to take

the good advice she got from every quarter. I may say I have been chary of giving advice ever since; in my experience, the better the advice, the more liable it is to send people off on the wrong track, just out of contrariness.

"Midwifery isn't going to make much of a living for the three of you," Alice was saying, while she twiddled my fingers about as if they were bits of putty.

"I know that," I answered, "and what's more, I don't really fancy a plate up on my door, with 'Mrs. Timson, Certified Midwife.' It's not the kind of thing that will do any good for Kathleen and Jo." I could imagine how the other children would tease my two. So I determined to take the bull by the horns. "What sort of a chance would I have in your line of business, Alice?"

It was a long while before she answered.

"What money have you got?"

"The alimony. Not another penny in the world. And I may as well tell you, I'm owing nearly a year of it."

"But won't they make him responsible for the debts you contracted while you were his wife?"

"What's the good? I've gone round to most of our creditors and told them it's no use making Harry bankrupt or we'll none of us see a penny. And I've given my word to pay off everything that concerns me and the children in three years from now. So you see the sort of hole I'm in."

"You are a silly old Rose, aren't you?" But she said it lovingly, and I knew she understood the sort of pride I had, which would not let me take advantage of the fact I had been Harry's wife to get out of responsibility for our debts. "You've got good hands"—she was pushing her thumbs down between my knuckles and forcing them apart—"good, strong, well-muscled hands: padded, but not fleshy in the wrong way. My word, I wish I had hands like yours!"

"Alice. What does a masseur earn?"

She gave me a slow, thoughtful look.

"They say massage is still a thing of the future. It's not been exploited here, yet, as it is in America."

"You mean, there's a future in it?"

"There certainly isn't much present!" She laughed at my crestfallen look. "I get five shillings an hour, working for the Institute, or between three and four guineas a week,

according to the number of cases I take. It's very hard work," said Alice soberly, "and it's no use going on when you're tired; you lose your sense of touch and resistance, and either punish the patient or don't get any results."

"Do you mean to say that's all you make, for the hours you put in?" It looked as if I had been barking up the wrong tree, and I felt suddenly very tired and blank, and, for the first time, frightened of the future.

"Of course, as a private practitioner you can make more. I have several private patients now, that I treat at their own houses, and they pay me double the Institute fee; but it means I have to cut down my Institute work, so what I make on the swings I lose—at any rate part of it—on the roundabouts."

"But I'd always heard there was a fortune in massage!"

Alice had a delightful smile; it began very serious, then her eyebrows flew up and the corners of her mouth twitched and you saw her pretty red tongue between the two shining rows of her teeth.

"Well, you know, there's massage and—massage! They say the L.C.C.'s going to have an inquiry, and if that happens, a good many brass plates will have to come down and some of the West-End johnnies are going to miss a lot of fun."

That didn't sound a very safe game to me.

"How do you get private patients?" I asked presently.

"People who come to the Institute recommend me, and a few of the doctors are taking massage seriously. Dr. Remington—don't you remember him? He was House Surgeon in our time—he's married a rich wife and set up in Harley Street. He gives me quite a lot of work, and several of Weir Mitchell's friends that I met in America remember me. I hope to give up the Institute soon and set up a practice of my own."

"Of course, you've studied the Swedish, haven't you?"

She shook her head.

"It doesn't suit everybody. It's useful with young patients, but I find it's too much for most of the older people. You know what Lauder Brunton says about massage." I didn't, so I nodded to her to go on. "It's main object is to increase circulation and improve nutrition; you don't need all that gymnastic stuff to do that. In fact, it only exhausts the system and burns up tissue—the very things you want to avoid. So

far as I'm concerned, the course I took in Swedish was waste of time; the more I do, the more I come back to the manipulative work I learned with Dr. Mitchell. Have you read his monograph on neurasthenia?"

Of course I hadn't. I had been so long out of the nursing profession that I had lost all touch with modern developments, and although I had a vague idea that medicine had come on a long way since I was in the hospital, I had never heard the name of Weir Mitchell or of his famous "rest cure" until I was talking to Alice.

We talked for a long time, I getting more and more despondent, for it seemed from what Alice told me that massage was not at all the simple business, half trick-work and half physical strength—of which I knew I had plenty—that I had been led to believe. I knew afterwards that she was testing me, to find out how serious I was. Alice was like that; her work was her religion, and there was no question of trifling with either.

"Well," I said at last, "there doesn't seem much point in discussing it, as I've got no money to pay for a training."

She put my hand down and folded her arms again; her brows went into soft folds in the middle and she looked me straight in the eye.

"I can teach you all I know, Rose, if you give me your word you'll use it *in my way*."

I was not quite sure of what she meant, but I nodded eagerly.

"And then shall I be able to set up on my own?"

"Yes, as things are now," she answered. "But I wouldn't be surprised if things tighten up in the future. There are a good many unqualified practitioners in London, and the medical profession is beginning to talk of bringing in a diploma."

"That takes me out! I'd never pass an examination in my life. Good gracious, don't you remember what I was like in those tests at the hospital?"

Alice burst out laughing.

"Oh, come on, Rose! It's not like you to jump your stiles before you come to them. You're healthy, aren't you?"

I hastened to assure her that, apart from the trouble I had in getting over Jo's birth, I had never had a day's illness in

my life. No, I didn't get tired. My periods were regular. I didn't suffer from dropped womb, or any of the ailments which are supposed to afflict women of the working classes (I was startled for a moment to find myself included in this category) after childbirth.

"I should think all you need is toning up: I don't mean drugs or tonics, but getting your muscles in working trim," concluded Alice, when I had satisfied her on the other matters.

"I shouldn't think there's much wrong with my muscles, considering the amount of housework I do!" I told her.

It wasn't the same thing, she answered.

"Each job of work you do in the house means a change of posture. You make a bed, then you brush a carpet; after that, perhaps, you are stretching up, dusting a picture rail. Massage means spending hours in more or less the same position; repeating the same routine of actions—probably under conditions you wouldn't choose for yourself. At the Institute we have proper, high, narrow couches for the patients, hard and flat, that make the work easy. One of my private patients has a bed that is only about eighteen inches off the ground. Think what that means, when you are doubled up over it for nearly an hour! Another insists on a feather mattress. Try doing deep massage on a feather mattress, and you'll find out what it's like. I can hardly crawl to the bus when I've finished with that one."

Well, she showed me some exercises for the body and the hands, which I promised to do every day for a fortnight before I went to her for my first lesson ("and the first thing you do is to buy a pair of rubber gloves; no more housework in bare hands for you"), and I felt as if I was walking on air when I hurried off to Stanley's, where the girls were waiting for me.

I suppose the light must have been shining right out of me, for I saw several people look, and, just as I had been conscious of myself in *The Copper Kettle*, so I now realised that, although I was thirty-four, my waist was as trim as a girl's and my ankles as neat. I knew one man in particular was interested; in fact, I heard him stop, and then follow me a little way; but I suppose he was discouraged by my purposeful style of walking. I felt like turning round and saying to him:

"So far as you or any more like you are concerned, I might

as well be pigeon-toed, with a squint!" That's how I felt then about men, and how I've felt more or less ever since; for, from the moment I made up my mind to get rid of Harry, I decided I belonged to the girls, and no one else. No sort of ill-feeling, or sex enmity; I just realised that men were an expensive luxury that a woman in my position could not afford to indulge. If they don't take it out of you in money, they do it in other ways; and whatever I had left belonged to Kathleen and Jo. I was quite clear in my mind about that. So I was glad when the footsteps stopped, and I hurried on, hoping the girls had been good—Jo in particular, who was inclined to fret, if I was away too long. Nora let me in, and when we were in the sitting-room, I saw them playing on the "lawn" at the back of the house. I was relieved to see that Kathleen wasn't teasing Jo, and that they both seemed quite contented.

"Jo's wet herself twice," Nora was complaining. "I do think she's old enough to ask, at six."

It was not worth while explaining to her that Jo was very shy about "asking," and that she never wet herself at home; but I thanked Nora for washing the drawers, which were drying on the clothes-horse in front of the fire, and felt annoyed because they happened to be a patched pair, which I'd had to pop on the child because the others were not aired.

Nora was looking at me with a kind of sly curiosity; I think, in spite of her disapproval, she felt it was exciting to have a divorced woman in her house, although she would have bundled me quickly out of the way, if any of her friends had come in.

"So that's the end of it." She could not help saying something, although she had said many a time she did not care about discussing such nasty subjects. I agreed, that was the end. A queer look came over her face—she was one of those dark, little-faced women, who can crowd more expression into a few inches than most people get by using all they've got. She never needed to say much, for her face said it for her, and I must say I would have been sorry to set tongue to one-half the things that Nora put across just by screwing up her lips and chasing her eyes into the corners. I have heard her called "a very tactful woman." My God! If Nora's is tact, give me a bull in a china shop. The worst was, you could

never pin anything on a woman who didn't put it into words.

"I'll remember you to Stan," she said.

I laughed outright. "That's all right, Nora. I wasn't thinking of waiting until he came in. Why should I?"

That shook her a bit. She pulled some more faces. The old silent pictures were still going; Nora could have made her fortune, if Stan had sent her to Hollywood. She mumbled:

"He's very worried just now, with the business. I'm sure I don't know where we'll be, if things don't look up."

Knowing that Stan had just bought her a new bedroom suite and renewed his railway contract, first-class instead of third, I had the answer for that.

"Listen, Nora. You needn't be afraid I'll ever ask Stan—or, if it comes to that, Alfred or Ozzy—for a penny. On the contrary, perhaps it won't be long before I'm in a position to help you; and I hope," I added, feeling that this was not very kind, "that if you ever want it, you won't let the past make any difference. I have my faults, but I'm not mean and I don't bear malice. It would make me happy if I could do anything for you in any way." And I meant it; because talking to Alice had made me think of mother, and of Laura, praying to God to make her love Stanley if she couldn't like him. Blood is thicker than water, and I knew mother, if she had been alive, would have expected us to help one another—a point of view that hadn't occurred to the boys.

Before Nora had time to answer, or even arrange a face or two, the girls, who had seen me through the window, came charging in as if they hadn't seen me for weeks. So I put Jo into her drawers and made them thank their Aunt Nora for having them, and we set out for home.

When I said we were walking, Kathleen started to scream and stamp her feet, they had probably been running about until they were tired. But Stan's house was just beyond the penny stage; it would have been sixpence for the three of us, and I had to count the coppers. When I had dragged and scolded Kathleen along to the bus stop, there were nearly a dozen people waiting, and the first three buses that came along were full. I knew I could not scramble on with the children. It was getting dusk, and the trees had lost their green gay look and were shabby and dusty like the people in the streets;

the wind was blowing the bus tickets about and plastered a dirty newspaper that had been used to wrap butchers' meat against Jo's bare legs; she started to whine and whimper that she was cold. "Let's walk, Mammy, let's walk."

So I made them walk, and as we were trundling on together, I found myself looking at the girls for the first time as if they were not my children: seeing them as other people would see them—perhaps as mother would have seen her granddaughters; and I got a shock.

When you hold a book too close to your eyes, the print blurs. I believe it is like that over your own flesh and blood. Kathleen and Jo were close to me, mine, out of my own body; I was used to seeing them, smelling them, feeling them; their little limbs were as familiar to me as my own. Since Harry went away, they had slept with me in the big bed, and in the night they would crush in so close that it was like having them part of me again. I'd wake up with Kathleen's hair across my face, and a damp patch in my shoulder, where Jo had nozzled in like a little animal. On cold nights we would lie what Kathleen called "spoon-ways"—all turned one way, Jo curled up between my shoulders and my knees and Kathleen behind me with her arm flung across me, and all our feet cuddling together for warmth. I knew it was not supposed to be healthy, but it was comforting; it was bliss, just to be like that with the children; it was innocence and peace come back again after ten years of vexation and torment. It was just simple, animal maternity, like a bitch, happy and content with her litter—not bothering about the past or the future, not conscious of anything but warmth and softness and slow breathing and little snuffling noises of pleasure.

Of the two, Kathleen was like her father. She had Harry's lightness and lankiness of build, and the same effect of the head being too small for the body. She had also, I now noticed, the same sly look in her eyes: never looking one quite straight in the face, lolling her head on one side and rolling her eyes into the corners. Her mouth, too, was Harry's; thin in the upper lip, the lower one full and inclined to be sullen. She was much too thin for her age, and although I gave her all the nourishing food I could buy, her skin was the greyish-white of mother o' pearl. She had beautiful narrow hands and feet; these were certainly from Harry's side of the family,

for my people were inclined to be big-handed and big-footed, with fingers stubbed and padded at the tips—not tapering, as Kathleen's were.

Jo was extraordinarily like Laura at the same age, although she would never grow up to Laura's beauty, for she was a brown little thing, sprinkled with moles all over her chubby face and body. Luckily, the ones on her face were in the right places; there was one just below the outer corner of her right eye and another on her chin, and there were two tiny ones behind her left ear. We always called them her beauty spots, though the one on her chin had started to give trouble before she was out of her teens, and eventually we had to try electrolysis, which left a little scar, but did away with the tuft of hairs with which she was threatened. She was highly strung, but as lively as a cricket, and I could understand Harry making a favourite of her, although I was sorry about it on Kathleen's account; I think it made her bitter.

Going along, with them on each side of me, I realised for the first time how badly they walked: scraping their feet and stubbing their toes like gutter children, lolling about, and Kathleen as hump-backed as a camel, which scared me until I got her against the doorpost and found her spine was as straight as my own. They had just got into bad habits because, for the last eight or nine months, I had had too much on my mind to keep a proper eye on them, and schools, as far as I can make out, never see anything.

"Use your handkerchief, Kathleen!" I told her sharply.

"I haven't got one!" I noticed with a shock that what she said was practically "Oi 'evn't got one!"

"Has daddy come home yet?" Jo was asking. As, in spite of what I had said to George, I wasn't prepared for the question, I pretended not to hear. Jo gave my hand a tug, and, happening to look at Kathleen, I saw her giving me one of her sly glances, and that she grinned and twisted her head away. I knew in a flash that Kathleen had heard something—some smutty school gossip; for of course plenty of people knew that Harry had left me, and none, in our neighbourhood, would be particular what they said in front of children:

"What's the matter, Kathleen?" I asked her, and she wriggled her shoulders in a silly way and giggled, "Nothing." I'd have liked to slap her. Jo kept on teasing me about Harry,

and at last I said I would¹ tell them when we got home. For one thing, it would give me a little more time to think, and, for another, I knew that Jo, who was fond of her daddy, was likely to make a scene in the street, if I said he was not coming back to us. I wasn't prepared to hear Kathleen say:

"Daddy's a . . ."

I should not like to put down what Kathleen called her father, and I realised in a minute what bad company the child had been keeping; for, although Harry was foul-mouthed on occasions, he generally took care what he said before the girls, and I would swear would sooner have cut his tongue out than used the word Kathleen brought out as pat as if she was saying "rabbit." It took the breath out of me.

I did not scold her then, although I said she was never to let me hear her use that word again: at which she giggled and flounced and seemed to think she had been clever, but as I took no notice she soon subsided, and sulked for the rest of the way home.

After tea I knew I was for it, and thought the sooner it was over the better, so that if there were any scenes they could be over by bedtime; and I made them sit down and said something like this to them: (Remember, I didn't want them to know anything about Harry's cruelty to me, or the way he neglected us and got us a bad name by his behaviour. I did not know how much Kathleen had noticed, but I wanted to put all that out of her mind, and show her that those things had nothing to do with Harry and me parting.)

So I began by saying that when two people were fond of each other, it was a good thing for them to get married and live together and have children like Kathleen and Jo. Here I tried to put in something about love making babies, and that they were here because Harry and I had loved each other so much. It was the sort of thing mother might have said, but it stuck in my throat. I'm not a hypocrite, and if love had anything to do with those two poor children of mine call me a Cherokee! My love for Harry—that sort of love—was finished before the end of the honeymoon, and each of my pregnancies was the result of rape. It's not pretty, but that's the truth of it. So I cut out the part about love.

"Are you listening, Kathleen?" She was kicking the leg of the chair. "But sometimes people change their minds, or

find out they have made a mistake, and they like somebody better than the one they are living with." I picked Kathleen up, gave her a shake and sat her on my knee. Jo had crept up and was pressing against me; I knew she was going to cry in a minute, though I don't think she understood what I was talking about.

"Daddy found someone he liked better, didn't he?" said Kathleen, with a sort of sly satisfaction that shocked me.

"How do you know?"

She wriggled and sniggered again, and this time I did give her a smack—a good sharp one

"Don't behave like that! It's downright common. For goodness' sake, child, you might be a guttersnipe!" And then, of course, I had to tell her that if she didn't stop whimpering I'd send her to bed without finishing the story. "And who told you about Daddy?"

She was scared enough to stop being silly, and mumbled something about "a girl in her form." I didn't ask the name.

"I'm surprised the teacher lets little girls talk about things they know nothing about, Kathleen."

"But that's what you're telling us, isn't it? Daddy has gone away with Mrs. Hornby, hasn't he?" she stopped whining to ask.

I hadn't time to be surprised, or upset by the nasty, squalid turn the story had taken, for Jo opened her mouth and let out a roar that nearly deafened us, and Kathleen—I couldn't help being sorry for the child, for it showed I was right in what I had suspected about her feelings over Harry favouring Jo—shouted at her:

"You see, daddy likes Mrs. Hornby better than he likes you—so *sucks* to you!"

Well, after that there was nothing to do but try and calm Jo down. Goodness, the noise that child made when she cried! The neighbours used to bang on the walls or shout things, and one day a stranger walked in from the street and said we ought to be reported to the R.S.P.C.C. It was sheer nerves, and she was frightened of the noise she made herself, which of course made it worse for her. Even Kathleen, who was often the cause of it, would jump up and down with her fingers in her ears, shouting, "Don't, don't, don't, don't!" as if she could not bear it.

But to-night Kathleen began to cry too; not, I think, that she minded Harry going, but that she was frightened of the change that had come into our lives, and did not know how to express her feelings. Between the pair of them I was nearly distracted, trying to think what mother would do in my place. Jo looked as if she might roar herself into a fit at any minute, and Kathleen was wailing in a quiet sort of heartbroken fashion, that was harder to bear than Jo's screams.

I got them into bed at last, and I tried to make up some sort of story about the good times we were going to have, and how we would have a little house with a garden, and keep chickens and grow our own flowers; but I was too tired to make a very good job of it. When they were asleep, I stumbled downstairs and knelt down in front of the rocking-chair. It was so long since I had said my prayers that I hardly remembered how they went, but I said something, and asked God to bless me, the girls, George and Alice. I thought of dear old George, and "the trouble's over"! For me it was just beginning.

CHAPTER FOUR

I'VE ALWAYS been an energetic woman, and the healthy up-bringing we had as children was my salvation after I got married, but the last four or five years had taken it out of me, and I had a lot of leeway to make up. Alice impressed it on me that half a masseur's stock-in-trade was not only to be healthy, but to look healthy. "It's half suggestion with most of these people," she told me. "Especially the neurasthenics. If you can carry the feeling of energy with you when you go to treat a patient, you're sure to be doing good. You're always a live spark, Rose, but just now your liveliness is coming off your nerves. We've got to get rid of those nerves and replace them with real staying power."

It would have been easy enough if I had sent the children back to school; but after what Kathleen told me, I was determined they should not go there again. Until I had found a new place for them, I was going to try and keep up their reading, writing and sums myself, and meanwhile pay atten-

tion to their behaviour and manners, so that they should not make a bad impression on their new teachers. I was beginning to feel as if I was back at school myself!—for Alice insisted on my reading some of her text-books. I've never cared for reading, unless it was a good, racy novel with what Harry called "a bit of ginger" in it, and book work always defeated me; but I dug out some of my old anatomy notebooks and tried to make out the diagrams and remember some of my theory—which was never up to much. All the practical side interested me, but I never had the patience for the book work which seemed to me a waste of time. I suppose I'd never have passed my examination at one of the big hospitals, but they were easy-going at the Cottage, and as I was a handy girl in other ways, they let me through.

Dear old George! He couldn't believe his eyes one evening when he found me at the table, with my fingers pushed into my hair, trying to make head or tail of a chapter on anatomy. I threw myself back in my chair and burst out laughing at the sight of his face.

I'd asked George in a time or two, partly because I gathered he was pretty bored at home, and partly for my own sake; for, I admit it, now Harry was gone, I was lonely. One gets in the habit of having a man around, and, believe me or not, there are times when you would even welcome a black eye for the sake of a little company. I expected I would enjoy getting the place clean, and having it to myself, without tobacco ash ground into all the covers and beer rings along the mantelpiece; but a clean house doesn't amount to much if you have no one to share it with. The girls were not old enough to be real company—I was never one of those mothers who enjoy playing baby games—and, as a matter of fact, they were giving me a bad time. I'd begun to wonder if I was growing into a nagger; for what with Kathleen's impudence and Jo's nastily little habits, like scratching her head (which was as clean as a whistle) and picking her nose, there always seemed to be a row on, and I was often worn out by the time I got them to bed.

George was a real comfort, and I had grown fonder of him than ever—although not, of course, in the way he wanted. And if the neighbours chose to talk—well, I thought, let them.

We were going to get out, anyhow, as soon as I had paid up the back rent.

"What's all this about?" asked George, coming round to look over my shoulder. I closed the book, because there happened to be a diagram that would have given him a jolt in his sensibilities. People like George like to think that women think that men are made like the wax dollies you see in toy-shop windows.

"George," I said solemnly, "have you ever heard of your extensor longus digitorum?"

I nearly burst at the look on his face; George, in fact, was getting in the habit of expecting me to be rude. It tickled him, actually, but he felt it was his duty to be shocked.

"Or your tibialis posticus, George? Do you happen to have that about you?"

He gave a sort of uncomfortable chuckle, and I took pity on him.

"It's all right; they're two quite respectable muscles in the lower part of the leg. At least, that's where they are at present. This time to-morrow evening they might as well be behind your left ear, so far as they concern me. I'll never know anatomy, George, and I'm beginning to suspect I'm wasting my time." And I threw the book on the floor. Then I had a good stretch, and a yawn and a blink, and prepared to make myself agreeable over the darning basket. But no; it appeared that was not George's idea at all."

"What about a glass of port at the Haymakers?"

"Why, George——!" He knew I never left the girls at night. There was a common sort of pub on the corner of the street and some of the rough customers made a din at closing time. I didn't want Jo to wake up and start her roaring if she found herself alone with Kathleen.

"I've brought Hetty along with me," said George.

"Hetty?" I didn't understand, until I remembered a nice little girl they had had for several weeks in the cash desk; always very pleasant to me and the children when we went in to do the shopping. I gave George rather a sharp look; for what was this about Hetty? Had she taken such a toss for George (it had happened with two or three of the assistants) that she would sooner help him along with another woman

than have him take no notice of her? And I felt a bit vexed with him for taking other people into his—or I might say, our—confidence. So I was a bit stiff about Hetty, while George, serene in his innocence, went on.

"She happened to mention she's lodging farther down the street, and she'd be glad to take the kids off your hands now and again in the evenings. She's a real nice girl, Rose; you can trust her."

Well, to cut it short, I opened the door, and there was Hetty, quite pleasant, making no fuss, and I thought, You must have fallen for George, if you'll just stand about in the street when he asks you to, to see if you're wanted! She came in, and I thanked her very much and asked her to sit down and make herself comfortable, and we wouldn't be gone long; at which I saw George give her a wink. But I got my hat and coat, and telling Hetty she would easily hear the children overhead, we went out into the lamplight.

Believe it or not, I felt quite excited and girlish, for I had not been out at night since Harry's departure, and I had almost forgotten what the streets looked like in the dark, the bright patches of yellow light lying on the pavements, the slippery bits like wet mackintosh on the cobbles and people's shadows stretching out like elastic as they hurried away from the lamps; and at the end of the funnel which was our little street, the reddish flare, reaching half-way up the sky, which meant the front of our new cinema on the main road, with buses and trams roaring past, sending flashes of blue electricity up into the red. I was for all the world like a child at a fair. And when we got to the end of the street, and George turned left and I turned right, so that we cannoned into each other, I stood giggling like a simpleton.

"What are you doing, George? This isn't the way to the Haymakers."

Then he grinned and put his hand in his pocket and brought out—two seats for the Empire, our local music hall! And they weren't complimentary, either, although I knew he got quite a few from the manager, for Monday nights. But this was a Saturday, the one night, in the suburbs, when the free list is suspended.

"There's a good bill this week—Harry Lauder and some-

body's troupe of acrobatic dancers; they're supposed to be fine. We're in nice time for the second house, and we can get a drink before we go in."

"The second house! But we shan't be out until after eleven. George, what's come over you?"

"It's all right," says George, as cool as you please. "Hetty'll wait."

Well, I was tickled. I had never seen George in this masterful vein before, taking the lead and laying down the law as if we had been married twenty years! And although I wished he had let me know before, so I could have put on my hat with the blue wings, and not come out in a pair of old woollen gloves, I let out a bit of a laugh as George took my arm to steer me across the road. He did not let go of my arm again until we were walking up the steps of the Empire, when he gave it a pinch—the nearest he had ever got to familiarity, I bet, with any woman!—and said:

"You're a real sport, Rose—game for anything!"—which was almost fulsome, for George.

There's something about the music hall that "gets" me. Even a bill in the provinces, when there isn't a name that means a thing. I'll pay my money for a stall, or a box, if I can get it, and I'll have two hours and a half of what does you good. The girls tease me about it; Kathleen is all for Noel Coward and Laurence Olivier, and it would break Jo's heart to miss one of Ivor Novello's first nights. I like them myself. There's something kind and warm and glowing about Ivor that comes right over the footlights, besides being a real artist. But I wasn't educated for Shakespeare, and as for the sort of people Noel Coward writes about, in his *Private Lives*—I see enough of them, in my own private life, to last me a lifetime.

The music hall is different. To my way of thinking, the audience matters as much as the people on the stage, and I always say you see people at their best in the music hall. I don't mean on their best behaviour; behaviour is a cheap sort of thing we slip on like a mask over our real selves. I like the music hall because it's vulgar, and simple, and nobody is trying to appear something they aren't—at least, that's the way it was in the days I am talking about. There were women with breasts and bottoms, and not ashamed of them either; and

little men with red noses, who did a strip-tease that finished up with a pair of red flannel underpants. Now the West End's gone genteel; but go down East, or into some of the little suburban or provincial halls, and you will still find the good old stuff, that gets the belly-laughs and helps the digestion. And now and again, even in the West End, you come across somebody like Nellie Wallace or Sophie Tucker—"She's a Yankee," says Kathleen; but I say, "No, my girl, she's universal." There's more plain, elemental humanity about Sophie Tucker singing "Yiddisher Momma" than you'll find in a trip round the whole of the legitimate stage to-day. And even she's ancient history. Now we have Arthur Askey and Tommy Trinder; nice clean boys and a nice clean show, because, of course, they have to keep top-sides with the B.B.C. The B.B.C.'s done more to ruin entertainment in England than Mrs. Ormiston Chant—who was before my time; but I guess her descendants are running Broadcasting House to-day.

We were in the third row of the stalls, and George bought me a box of chocolates. We were a bit on the right, which meant we were near the percussion, but who cares? The man with the kettledrums gave me the glad eye and I winked back at him. No harm in it, it was just part of being warm and jolly and all friends together. The man on my left had a big blonde with him, all sables and Jockey Club perfume; we got quite friendly, and had a drink together in the interval. George was a bit awkward—he was never easy with strangers, like me, and he never took people on face value. What does it matter what they are, I used to say to him, if they're good company? Poor old George; he was always missing the fun, with his starchy notions.

I didn't care for Harry Lauder, because I never can think what makes the Scots think they're funny; and the acrobatic dancers worried me a lot. It really upset me, to think what those girls were doing with their ilco-claecal valves and their transpylorics while they were tying themselves in knots, as they had to do, in the course of their routine. Then Cissie May came on, and it was as if the lights went up full strength and the band pushed the roof off and, all running round the stalls and the circles, there was one big smile.

Little did I think, the first time I listened to her number,

"I don't mean what you mean," that was the foundation of her career in the West End, that the time would come when I would be spending my Sundays with Cissie down at her place at Sunningdale. I just rolled about in my fauteuil, and George, who, to begin with wondered if he ought to laugh, was carried away as well.

It wasn't her voice or her looks that made Cissie a toplineer; it was just her way. She would come down to the footlights and pop a line across in that hoarse, cosy voice of hers, and the next thing there'd be a crack of laughter from the house that split your ears and went on for minutes, while Cissie stood rubbing her nose and looking as if she knew she had forgotten something important, but she couldn't quite think what it was. Every line she spoke was one just between you and her, and the wink she gave, when the band was playing her finale and the curtain was swinging down on her, was, "Well, cheery-o, old dear, see you again soon." Cissie was the music hall: all its warmth, its friendliness and its light; its understanding of the common man, its sympathy with his joys and his sorrows, its big, heart-swelling courage. She would bring a lump in your throat, and a minute after, have you splitting your sides. I say to Kathleen, "Show me your Oliviers and your Evanses that can do that."

We had a lovely time, and when we came out, I felt as if I had had a tonic. Sometimes I have felt like saying to the people who come to me for treatment, "Go and spend an hour at the music hall, my dear; it will do you more good and cost you less than the guineas you spend with me." Of course, it would be bad for business; but it's God's truth. Half the women who come crawling to me don't want anything but taking out of themselves. They only need a good laugh at themselves (as well as at the performance), and that is what people like Cissie give us.

I told Alice next day that if being a masseur meant learning up all those unnatural names, I might as well give it up and find a job as a shopwoman, or something. I told her so perfectly boldly—and I didn't give a damn. Cissie had done something for me; she had made me sure of myself as a woman, and when you have got that, nothing else matters. I felt that, if I could not do massage, there were dozens of other

ways in which I could make a living for the three of us, and it was only a matter of a little time before I had another bright idea. But Alice encouraged me.

"Never mind the names," she said. "The main thing is to get a kind of map inside your mind, of the bones and muscles and the principal organs; if you've got that in front of your mind's eye, each time you lay your hands on a human body, you can't go far wrong. And in time you'll forget all about it, and it'll all come to you through your fingers." My hands were much better already, for I had taken her advice and wore rubber gloves even for the lightest work, like dusting: I was doing all sorts of wrist and finger exercises, too, that improved my circulation, and each morning I used to touch my finger tips, and I was surprised to feel how delicate and sensitive they were growing. Especially the left hand; I suppose that is the one that takes the least punishment in the ordinary course of one's work.

I want to take the next part as quickly as possible, for some of it is not very pleasant, and there is never anything to gain by dwelling on disagreeable subjects.

I was setting so much apart each week, towards our debts, and this, as you can imagine, kept us very short of money. I knew better than go short on food, but I couldn't have sent the children to school if I had wanted, for I couldn't have fitted them out. There were several charities that would have helped me, but I would not start them off on charity. I was having enough trouble as it was, from the inspector who kept calling to know why they were not at school. If your income is below a certain level, you've got no rights over your children, according to the L.C.C. I had a tussle each time he called, for I didn't mean to be jumped into anything before I had time to make up my mind.

Then, in spite of my promises, there was trouble with some of the creditors, who got together and sent the broker's men in. I was in a state about that, because I had taken everything I could spare to the pawnshop, and what we had left was barely enough to represent civilisation. The long and short of it was, I had to get a loan; and this meant that, although I had paid off a little of what was owing, I was worse off than I had been before, because there was the interest to pay back.

I went to my brother Stanley. It was about the bitterest

moment in my life, so far. The only way I made myself do it was by saying to myself, Now, my girl, you're going to have plenty of pills to swallow before you've finished, so you may as well get into practice. My bit of boasting to Nora didn't make it any pleasanter. I must have been what the French call *entêtée* that day when I got my divorce; I seem to have flounced round making a fool of myself everywhere.

I could have gone to Alfred or Oswald, but I chose Stanley because I knew he would be the most bloodless of the three of them. Alfred would have blustered and bargained, and reminded me of father, and asked how I meant to go on, if this was the way I started—as if it was any business of his!—and grumbled at me for not getting more alimony; and Ozzy would have gone white and shrill and shaky, and terrified he would never see his money back. One couldn't blame him, for he and Mona were only just managing, and there was a baby coming along soon.

Stan only sneered. He went to his desk, got a piece of paper and wrote something on it which he asked me to sign. I'm not the sort of fool who signs anything without reading it, and I saw he was letting me have fifty pounds for two years at five per cent interest. I picked up the pen and wrote "Rose Timson" across the bottom of the paper, and he made Nora witness it! That's the sort of thing you may expect when you have no securities, and have to go to a relation instead of the Jews. If I had known Cissie in those days I would have gone to her, like a shot; I can hear her bawling me out if I'd mentioned interest. Well, it was not necessary to mention it to Stan. Nora did a bit of overtime with her face, and the two of them had it worked out, without saying a word. People like Nora must keep out of a lot of trouble, through never having to talk.

After this was straightened out, we would have got on pretty well for a while, if it had not been for the trouble with Kathleen.

It was a Monday afternoon, and I was in the middle of the wash. I always tried to keep the children clean, and change them as often as they needed it, which, in a grimy district like ours, was almost every day. As they had not nearly enough, poor little souls, to keep them going for a week—especially not Kathleen, who was shooting up like a beanstalk

—there was always a line of damp clothes somewhere about the place; but Monday was the big wash—sheets, towels, tablecloths and my own body-linen. The house was full of steam and I was kept going like a machine, with meals to get, no proper place to set anything down, and the children to occupy in some way so as to keep them from quarrelling and getting into mischief. So I was thankful to get them out of the way, if only for five minutes.

About half-way down the street there was a little hardware store, and I had got in the habit of sending the children down for any odds and ends I happened to want. I would give Kathleen the coppers, and tell her to hold Jo's hand, and as they were never out of sight of the front door, it did not seem as if anything could happen.

I wanted starch and a piece of sandpaper, I remember, that afternoon. I gave the money to Kathleen, made her repeat the order after me and reminded her to say Please and Thank You, and I left the front door ajar, so that they could come straight in without knocking. Plenty of people in the street did not use their front doors, but I never let the children go out at the back, which opened on an entry where some of the people threw out their rubbish, instead of using the dust-bins; and there were always bad smells and cats with mange, eating stinking fish-heads. You couldn't keep Jo's hands off a cat, and I was scared of her catching something through stroking the poor beasts. Boys played in the entry, and wrote rude things on the walls and did rude things in the gutter; it wasn't a fit place for the girls, and I always kept the yard door bolted, though it sometimes meant going out in the rain for the coal and garbage men.

I was in the yard, pegging the sheets on the line, when I heard something that made my heart stand still. It was Jo's bellow, at first in the distance, but coming nearer and nearer—up the entry. I let the wet sheets fall in the dirt, and before you could blink I had the yard door open. There was Jo, roaring at the top of her voice, with her fists in her eyes, and not a sign of Kathleen. I snatched Jo up, looking up and down the entry, which happened to be empty, and tried to get her to tell me what had happened to her sister. All she could get out was, "She's gone with the man."

With Jo still in my arms—she was such a lump, I could

hardly lift her—I ran to the shop; but somebody else had come in after the children, and the woman had been serving her and had not noticed them going out. I don't know how long I spent, running up and down the street, asking every one I saw if they had seen a little girl in a blue tweed coat; and it was not long before a crowd collected (Jo bawling all the time), and of course they all started talking about the things that happen to children who get picked up in the street by strange men. Jo was too much of a baby to tell me anything that would help, although I managed to gather that "the man" had come up to them as they came out of the shop, and had offered Kathleen sweets. We don't know to this day what possessed her to go off with him and leave Jo by herself.

I rushed to the store to find George. I must have looked a sight, flying in with Jo in my arms, my arms bare from the washtub, my hair falling down and the sweat running down my face. There was a woman in a fur coat, talking to George very la-di-da, and I pushed her away as if she was a side of bacon. "George!" I cried. "Kathleen's gone!" I saw from the look on his face that he was as horrified as I, then I saw Hetty, who had seen there was something the matter, coming towards us from the cash desk, and that's all I remember. Somebody snatched Jo from my arms, and I cracked down on the sawdust—we were in the provisions—and passed out in front of them all.

It was five hours before we found Kathleen. George telephoned the police, then he put another girl in the desk and sent Hetty home with us. I shall never forget those five hours. I had not a grey hair in my head until that day; a week or two later I was combing out my brush and there were four, as white as silver. But it wasn't until after the war—the first war—that I took to henna.

It was nearly half-past seven when a policeman walked in, with Kathleen holding his hand. She was as cool as you please, although I saw her give a quick look to see how angry I was. Hetty had got Jo into bed and, luckily—I suppose because she had worn herself out with crying—she had fallen asleep like a log. I couldn't say a word. I sat in the rocking chair, with Kathleen's little body in my arms, until after nine o'clock. I did not even move to light the gas, or get

the child her supper. I couldn't; it was like being paralysed. She hadn't much to say for herself either—only that she was thirsty, and her feet were cold. The policeman had answered my look with a nod, as much as to say, "All right," and said he would be round to see me in the morning.

Next day, I tried to get Kathleen to tell me about it, but I did not get much out of her. The man had offered her sweets, as Jo said, and asked her to come for a walk with him.

"But didn't you think about leaving Jo?"

Oh, Jo had started to cry and run off down the entry. The man said he couldn't wait, and took Kathleen's hand and walked very quickly down Ladysmith Road—that was a turning off our street, just the other side of the hardware shop. There were a lot of little jiggling turnings off that which Kathleen had not seen before.

"But weren't you frightened—going away like that with a strange man?"

No, it was fun. They pretended it was a game of hide and seek and they were going to get "home" first. Then, it appeared, they got on a bus—I could not understand Kathleen doing all this, for she wasn't a friendly child, like Jo—and had what she called "a lovely ride" to what I afterwards learned was Tooting Common, where the policeman found her sitting under a bush, the man having told her to wait for him.

This was all she would tell me, and I did not know how to question her, for you don't want to put things into a child's mind. I asked what the man had done, and she said "Nothing," but the way she said it told me she was telling me a lie, and she knew something wrong had happened. I had to leave it at that, and at the policeman's statement, which was that she hadn't seemed frightened or upset, but had come along with him readily enough. It was not until she was grown-up that Kathleen herself told me the whole story, which was what you might expect, although not so bad as it might have been.

Whatever it was, something furtive had crept into Kathleen. She was much quieter, and although her behaviour was better on the surface—as if she thought she ought to make up for the trouble she had caused me—I was not happy about her, and never liked leaving her alone with Jo. And I knew

I must get both of them away out of this squalid neighbourhood at once, if it meant going out as a servant to pay their school fees. It also struck me that it would help to save money if I gave up the house and took an unfurnished room somewhere. We would have to arrange something for the holidays, but I was never one for crossing my bridges before I came to them. Some of the optimism I had got from that night with George at the music hall still lingered with me, and I was positive that I could begin to save if I hadn't the house rent and the gas and the coal and the long dribble of little expenses a house seems to call for—especially when it is as old and gimcrack as ours was.

Alice had promised that as soon as she considered I was sufficiently trained, she would let me take over one or two of her simpler cases, which would enable her to give more time to the complicated ones which naturally paid better, although they demanded more of her energy. She was actually having to refuse work, and told me she could have doubled her income if she had taken a partner; but she was not sure yet if the practice would carry two of them, and she was afraid to let go of her Institute work, which still represented the backbone of her business and through which she had made most of her contacts. I expect people will smile at the idea of my setting up as a masseuse after only a few weeks' training, but massage in those days was mainly patting, kneading and rubbing, with some manipulations of the joints; all that electrical therapy and infra-red and vibro had not come in, or was used only by a few advanced practitioners.

The arrangement was to be that Alice should see the patient, decide on the type of work that was necessary and give the first treatment, while I watched; then she would say, "Now I'm going to hand you over to Mrs. Timson," and I would carry on. I expected the patients to object at first, but very few of them did and after a treatment or two they seemed to like me. Of course, it was only the very simplest work; bowels or nervous headaches, mainly. The sort of thing anybody with a bit of common sense and good, firm hands could have done for them, instead of paying half a guinea a time—of which Alice very generously insisted I should take two-thirds.

But I am running a long way ahead. At the time I am talking about I was still learning what Alice called my "map," and lying awake every night, wondering what in the world to do with Kathleen and Jo.

CHAPTER FIVE

LOOKING BACK, it doesn't seem fair: how I got all the advantages of being married to George Glaize without the nuisance of it. He was always there on guard, like the faithful old watchdog chained up to his kennel at the back door—yes, I'm afraid it was the back door in the end, although that was his fault. George was welcome to my best, but I am a busy woman, and I like my friends to help themselves. When I have visitors I always tell them, "There's bells, my dears, and the house telephone if you want it; I keep my servants for use, not for ornament. You can stay as long as you like, so long as you look after yourselves and don't expect me to play with you until the evening." It suits most of our friends, but it doesn't go with a dilligent person like George.

Oh, dear, I must stop getting sentimental over poor old George. I never used to be, but it was that last birthday of his that started me off—down at Birling Gap, the summer before the war—the second war, I mean: when, as God's my judge I didn't mean to do it, but I let George down again.

After he retired, and bought his little bungalow in Sussex with Hetty to look after him, we did not see so much of each other but, come hail or snow (which aren't likely in July), the girls and I had to go down for his birthday, which was the high spot of George's year. We generally took him a case of wine, for his doctor had knocked him off spirits, and, for a man who had not been educated in vintages, he had a very fair palate. It was worth while picking out a good claret or burgundy for George; to the former he was very partial, ever since Jo took the trouble to bring him back a dozen of Châteauneuf du Pape from her motor tour in the Rhône valley. It always touched George, to have the girl remember him; and, to tell the truth, I was never quite sure if he

really liked what he called "the Pope" best, or whether he drank it ever after out of affection for Jo.

George's birthday was always the same: he had a great lunch for us, then a great tea, and a great dinner to finish up! The girls said they did not want to look at food for a week after George's birthday. But that was his way of showing us we were welcome, and the dearest things in his life. Poor old George. One must admit he didn't brighten with the years, and it was pretty dull for the girls, as there was nothing to do after we had been round the garden and admired the roses and the runner beans but sit on the porch and talk about old times. By the time dinner was over we were stupid with over-eating and felt like blown frogs. But we could not have disappointed George by going home early. Not until that unlucky birthday in July, 1913

It happened to be the day before young Peter ("Beetle") Curzon was married; he was throwing a big party at Claridge's, and I had promised to go. He had made a point of it. "No Tim, no party," was what he said, when he rang me up.

Well, I had pulled that boy out of a tight corner, and I did not like to go back on him. A dear little thing he was marrying; when he introduced me to her as "My oldest friend, Timmie," I thought, "Yes; and you ought to be ashamed of it." I thought how easily I could have ruined that pretty child's wedding day, and I swore I'd have the skin off young Beetle if I ever heard of his making her unhappy. Impudence! They have no limit to it. You would have thought I'd have been the last person he would have wanted to see at his party, but there I was, by special invitation. I couldn't resist giving him a pinch when he had the cheek to kiss me: "The skeleton at the feast," I whispered. I thought there was no harm in giving him a dig to sober him. But not a bit of it; Beetle let out a roar of laughter. "Some skeleton!" he said, as he looked at my green panne velvet and pearls. You can't shame 'em; well, so much the better. I never like to see a man down, and I had not forgotten the last time I saw Beetle Curzon—all white-faced and shivering: a very different person from the swaggering young rip who stood grinning at me on the eve of his wedding day.

I had to get back in time to change, and although I tried

to persuade the girls to stop on, they both insisted they had dates and must come home with me. We had gone down in Jo's little tourer, because the Rolls was being overhauled; and she was driving with Kathleen beside her. I sat behind. I've always been one to take a back seat!

"Poor old George!" said Kathleen. "Why don't you marry him, Mother? You'd never notice him about the place."

Jo let out a laugh and said I wasn't such an ass.

Perhaps my conscience was biting me, although George had hidden his disappointment nobly, and waved us off as cheerily as ever from the gate. The one who had shown her opinion was Hetty who, instead of coming to shake hands and wish us good-bye, had shouted she was busy in the scullery. It's all right, Hetty, I thought. You can't think less of me than I think of myself.

"You needn't be so smart, my girls," I told them. "I know who'd look the asses to-day, if it hadn't been for George. And I'd like to know," I went on, "where you'd have been, the pair of you, if I'd gone gallivanting off with a husband, instead of stopping at home to look after you."

I *think* Kathleen said "My God," but she was lighting a cigarette. Jo did not answer, and I thought, That's damped you down a bit, and serve you right, for disappointing George over dinner.

Here I am, off at a tangent again; it seems as if I can't follow the thread of my story. It must be old age.

But it really makes me ashamed to confess that when I was so worried about the girls' future, it was George, again, who came to the rescue. He was the last person I would have consulted, but of course he knew I had it on my mind, and one evening, when we were at the Haymakers (it was quite an understood thing now that Hetty came in once a week, and I had a couple of hours out with George), he said in his hesitating way.

"I don't know if you'll fancy it, Rose, but there's somebody I'd like you to meet."

"Who's your girl friend this time?" I said, for I was always chaffing him about Hetty. It was just something to keep the conversation moving, and it amused me to see him flush up as red as a carrot, and swear by all he'd got that Hetty was

just a good, useful girl, and they never exchanged a word outside of business, except on the nights she came along to me.

"It's a Miss Cleveland, quite a lady," he assured me. "Her and a friend keep the school on the other side of the Common. You know the kids: straw hats with ribbons round them, striped pink and white like candy."

"I'd **no** idea you'd got such an eye for fashions, George." I couldn't stop teasing him.

"Very nice-spoken ladies, both of them—especially Miss Cleveland; I fancy she's the head."

"I know the school you mean," I admitted. "But I can't afford candy-striped ribbons, and, anyhow, it's a day school, isn't it? That's not what I want at all."

"I know it isn't," said George patiently. "Still, I thought you might like to have a talk with Miss Cleveland. They're giving up here and moving out to Egham, and going to start a boarding school. She came in to ask if we can undertake delivery, as she would like to go on dealing with us."

My mind was racing like a train. I was in such a mess, it could not be worse; might as well hang for a sheep as a lamb.

"She might be able to advise you," George was saying.

"I want **more** than advice, George; I want board and keep and a good education for the girls; that's not as cheap as advice!"

George looked sheepish.

"Why don't you let me take you over in the van to-morrow morning? I'm going myself, because I promised I'd help them to work out a few ideas for catering——"

Now, I was snob enough not to be very keen on the prospect of calling on the girls' new headmistress (I was thinking of her as that already!) in a tradesman's van; but I gave myself a shake and told myself I should be blessing old George. I went to the telephone box, rang up Nora and arranged for her to have the girls for an hour; after all, she was Kathleen's godmother, and it was up to her to do something for us. And at eleven o'clock next morning, George and I were on the step of The Lodge, as the school was called.

I saw at a glance it was the sort of place I wanted. The children were in a playground at the side—not yelling and

creating mayhem, as they did at the other school; but running about and enjoying themselves in some sort of game that was supervised by the mistress, a good-looking girl who, I thought, gave George and me rather a supercilious look; and I noticed they did not call her "Miss," or "Teacher," but addressed her by her name, like civilised little beings. They were all in a plain sort of uniform; I thought how nice Kathleen would look in those brown, pleated frocks, and hastily stopped myself wondering how I should pay for them. For of course I could never afford a school like this.

I liked Miss Cleveland on sight. She was small and neat, in a well-cut tailormade, and she asked me if I would like coffee and offered me a cigarette as a matter of course, as soon as we sat down. I was glad of that cigarette—which surprised me, too; it made the situation more human and natural, somehow, and it gave me the feeling that Miss Cleveland was a woman of the world, to whom I could talk candidly—not wrapping things up and toning them down, as one expected to have to do with school mistresses. I found myself telling her all about Kathleen, and she was neither shocked nor sentimental.

"I fully agree with you, Mrs. Timson, that she ought to be taken right away from her present environment. I'd like to see her and talk to her, of course. I hope you'll forgive me for being straight with you: but there's always an element of risk in introducing a child with that experience into a children's community."

Frankly, that did give me a jolt, and even offended me a little: for it sounded as if Kathleen had some nasty kind of infection. But, on thinking it over, I saw she was right, and respected her for her honesty. Then she told me the new boarding school was mainly for children of kindergarten age—rather young for Kathleen, but all right for Jo; she used their names as if she knew them already. "But we are hoping to get a few older ones directly, and perhaps Kathleen will be the first of them."

This brought me up against it, for fees had not been mentioned. But by now I was liking Miss Cleveland so much that I started off again. I actually told her all about the divorce and the alimony, and how I was planning to earn my living, and everything. I could see it was a facer for her—

particularly the divorce part—but she stood up to it like a lady.

"You've been very frank in telling me all this, Mrs. Timson, and I appreciate it," she said, after a little pause. "You are in a difficult position, but I can see you are a courageous woman." There was no patronage in her tone, and she didn't offer me sympathy, and this suited me down to the ground. She went on briskly, "Now, what are we going to do about it?"

"I'm afraid I haven't thought"—I felt all sorts of a fool at having to admit it.

"It's obvious you can't afford the ordinary fees for Kathleen and Jo," she said, frowning as if she was thinking hard. "On the other hand—you won't misunderstand me for saying that I can't afford to run my school on a philanthropical basis! I'm in teaching, as you're in massage, to make money. Suppose you tell me what you think you could manage."

Of course I ought to have had it all worked out; but I was so excited at the thought of getting the girls into some good, safe place that I had lost my head completely. When I had floundered a little, she started to scribble something on her blotting pad.

"How would this do? Supposing you could pay me half to begin with: let's say, for a year. The second year, if your circumstances improve, you could probably manage the whole, and the third year"—she stopped and smiled at me. "You see, I'm taking it for granted you won't want to take the children away! In the third year you might be in a position to pay off a little of the debit on the first year. How does that strike you, as a business woman?"

The more I saw of Miss Cleveland, the more I was liking her. Some people—the sort that expect something for nothing—may think she was driving a hard bargain; but the last thing I wanted was charity in any shape or form, and I was grateful to her for understanding it. To cut a long story short, I burnt my boats. Kathleen and Jo were to start at Egham at the beginning of the autumn term—which gave me plenty of time to get their things ready. Miss Cleveland gave me the printed leaflet of the school equipment, and I glanced down it without turning a hair.

You may think I was mad. Looking back, the best things

in my life have come out of moments of madness, and the doubtful look in Miss Cleveland's eye when I looked up was enough to decide me.

"All right. I'll see to all this."

I made an appointment for her to see Kathleen, then I drove away inside the van with George. I think I must have frightened the driver, as well as him, for I sang the whole way at the top of my voice! I sang "The Honeysuckle and the Bee" and "Alexander's Rag-time Band," then I tried to remember Cissie's number, "I don't mean what you mean," and before we got back to the shop, I was lolling up against George, wailing out "In the Gloaming, O my darling." I couldn't have behaved worse if I'd been drunk.

I don't suppose that any one who reads this knows what real poverty means; the only blessing was, it didn't break my spirit, and it didn't make me cautious. If you're cautious, as well as poor, you may as well give up. Here was I, faced not only with the term's fees for the girls, which were supposed to be paid in advance—and I intended they should be; I wasn't going to start the girls off under a cloud—but with about a hundred pounds' worth of outfit; that, with the bed linen, towels, table napkins and so forth, was the lowest I could work it down to. It was not as if I could start them off with a good reserve of underclothes; all they had was either shabby or in ribbons, and it meant new everything from the skin up.

There was only one thing for it; I'd got to open an account with one of the big West End stores—the one that supplied the school uniform; and this, I knew, meant producing trade references. I could rely on George for one, and, luckily, my name was still on the books at Berridge's, where I had dealt, off and on, ever since I was a girl. So now we were off, and one morning I set out with the girls who, of course, were like March hares for excitement.

I had not realised that getting credit in the West End is as easy as kiss-my-hand. I thought I might have to wait for a day or two, while they took up the references, but, bless me, nothing of the sort; I was given to understand it was only a silly little formality, and that the whole store was at my disposal.

Well, there is no need to trail you from department to

department, but by the time we had got the shoes, underclothes, frocks, suits, blouses and blazers, my head was going round in circles. I signed bill after bill, and gave up looking at the totals. There was another woman, fitting out her little girl of about Kathleen's age, and nothing would do but the very best of everything, and sometimes two where only one was asked for. I suddenly felt something burst inside my head. Why should not my children have the best as well? There were two qualities of the brown cloth, and I had ordered the cheaper one. I countermanded it and asked for the best; I said carelessly, "You had better make an extra skirt to go with that costume; children always wear the skirts out first." Then I said that one linen frock was no use; suppose it got dirtied in the morning? "I'll have two of the afternoon frocks, in each of the sizes." You see, I had gone mad again. I spent nearly twice the sum I had worked out from the list before we left the department. At least my children should be as well turned out as any in the school.

Wherever I looked, there was something I envied for the girls: a little pair of fur mittens for Jo, whose hands were always cold in winter; a scarf of candy-pink wool the colour of the hat ribbon, which would lighten up the overcoat for Kathleen, who was inclined to go sallow when she got dark colours near the face. I priced little lace collar-and-cuff sets that would look nice on the brown linens, and while I was considering whether I ought to spend the money, the girls started to whimper and say they were hungry. There were dozens of people at the counter, the assistants were busy, and the floor almost as crowded as for a Christmas sale.

"Go on, go on; hold Jo's hand, Kathleen. and keep on ahead of me. That's the way—over there, towards the clock."

The children toddled ahead, people making way for them, because they were so small; and I was pushed this way and that—now up against one counter, now against another; and I kept seeing little things—and it was almost too easy. Only a question of what my pockets would hold, and then my handbag.

Supposing I had got caught? Pah! I knew they would never catch me. I happened to have a woven belt in my hand when I caught the assistant's eye fixed on me just a bit too sharply, I thought. Quick as a flash I smiled at her, and

suddenly, as if she couldn't help it, she smiled back. I had learned that smile from mother, and it wasn't the first time it had got me out of some awkward little corner. I held up the belt and leaned across the counter to her. "*Isn't* it a pretty thing?" I said, as if the idea had just come into my head. The girl was friendly at once. "Oh, yes, madam; but have you seen the others, at the end of the counter? Do go and look at them; they're really a wonderful selection for this between-the-seasons sort of time of year." I thanked her, put down the belt, and sauntered along, not hurrying. Luckily, there was another, just the same, on the stand at the end; it was exactly what I wanted for Kathleen's blue jumper suit. By the time the assistant had finished with the woman she was serving, we were out in the street.

Well, what about it? I was only getting for my girls the sort of things the woman in the dress department would buy for her daughter; and when little Vera, or whatever her name was, turned up with her blue necklace, or her initialled handkerchiefs, Kathleen and Jo would have their own things to show, equally pretty. I should like to say that I never had the least qualm, then or later, about what, as a matter of fact, I got in a habit of doing. I never felt like a thief, and, of course, I never looked like one. No one in their right minds would have thought of accusing a nice-looking, agreeable, well-mannered woman like me of shop-lifting! I didn't enjoy it, and I hoped the necessity would soon be over; but for the time being I accepted it as one of the unpleasant, necessary things, like borrowing money from Stanley, which belonged to this period of my life, and, although my heart hammered, that first time, like a traction engine, I soon got in the way of whisking up an oddment here or there, and, in this way, a little of the barrenness went out of our lives. I could not help chuckling about it the other day, when I was in Cartier's, helping Jo choose a cigarette case for her birthday. She asked me what I was smiling about, but I put her off with some cock-and-bull tale or other; Jo's sense of humour is like a piece of elastic, but I was not sure if it would run to hearing that her mother was once no better than a common sneak-thief.

Well, then we got in a taxi, and went to some tea-rooms in Piccadilly, which I had heard about from Alice, one of

whose patients had taken her there one day. It seemed very swell to us, although I believe it was a flashy sort of place that got a bad reputation in the end; but we had chicken sandwiches, chocolate with whipped cream on top and strawberry ices. I think the girls thought we had started to live in a fairy tale.

That night I went out with George again—twice in one week! The truth was, I was so excited I knew I could not settle down after the girls had gone to bed, so I rang him up at the shop, and, luckily, Hetty was free as well.

"Let's go in the saloon, George, for a change!" I was in a mood for company and a bit of friendly give and take, and he humoured me, although I could see he was disappointed. Dear old George; there was nothing gregarious about him, unfortunately, and his one idea was to get me cosily to himself.

The Haymakers was quite lively that night; it was one of those old-fashioned houses with a steady clientèle of regulars, and, seldom as we had been in the saloon, we were recognised and lots of people nodded to us. George, of course, planted me behind an aspidistra and told me in an unnecessarily loud voice that I'd be all right there, while he went to the counter for our drinks. I smiled a bit, but resolved to act like a lady, for his sake. It really did upset him when I back-chatted to strangers, and, after all, there was plenty of fun to be had in just watching people. All the same, it was one of those nights when I felt just tingling with life; it was fairly pouring out through the tip of my fingers, and I could feel my eyes snapping, and had to stiffen my lips to prevent myself from smiling when people looked at me.

Just the other side of the aspidistra, at an angle to where we were sitting, there was a very good-looking fellow, tall, broad, forty-ish, who seemed to be by himself; I knew he had his eye on me, and I'm afraid I felt it was rather a pity I was not alone, for we could have had some fun together. I don't mean that in any bad way; as I have already said I had had enough of sex to last me a lifetime, but I felt that this fellow would be jolly, would crack a good joke, and that, between us, we would have had the whole room laughing—which was a thing that could never happen with old George. I could not help letting a bit of a smile slip at him, and in a second his

eyebrows went up and he made a little movement as though to ask if he might bring his glass over to my table; at which, of course, I had to frown and nod towards George, who had just managed to crowd in to the counter, and was picking up his tankard and the port I had asked him to get for me.

But all the time I was keeping up the chatter with George, all about the day's shopping and what the girls had said and done, I kept looking at this other man and thinking what a good-looking fellow he was and what fun it would be to be chattering with him. I could feel him listening to me, and once or twice, feeling irritated with George for being such an old stick, I actually looked straight at him and said something that gave him a chance to join in the conversation. But—I suppose because George looked so glum—although he gave a chuckle, he did not rise to the bait.

"Well, Rose . . ." George had taken out his watch, and held it out so that I could look at the time. It just set me alight.

"Oh, for God's sake, don't be such a kill-joy, George! I'll have another port."

When he went to fetch it—reluctantly enough; not because he ever grudged me a drink, but because he was quite aware of the interest I was taking in the other fellow—I had made up my mind to speak, *aspidistra* or no *aspidistra*; but just as I was opening my mouth, the man looked round, and I saw a woman come in, and he got up to meet her.

Actually, I was very pleased; it would be much easier—and quite natural, in our corner—to make a party, if we were a foursome. The woman was very good-looking, young, well-dressed—the right sort for him, I thought, catching her eye as she sat down. I think she was as well-disposed towards me as I was to her—although it struck me she had rather a peevish mouth. But lo and behold, from the moment of her arrival, her companion had gone as cagey as George. No foursomes for him! He practically turned his back on me (I could see his reflection in a glass that happened to be opposite) and I could tell from the back of his neck and his shoulders that he did not mean to share her with anybody else.

I was more amused than piqued; especially when it presently appeared that the woman was no less bored with him than I was with old George!—who came back with the port

and a face as long as a yardstick. Well, then the fun began: for the woman and I started catching each other's eyes, in a sort of sympathetic fashion, and we both laughed and talked as loudly as ever we could, for each other's benefit, partly, and partly to rile our companions. George was purple with mortification, because other people began to listen in, and started laughing, for, actually, this female was very witty, and I'm not exactly slow in the uptake myself when it comes to back-chat, and of course, part of the fun was that we were not talking to, but at, one another, with George occasionally grunting an obligatory monosyllable and the other man—I could not hear what he said, for his voice had dropped to a mutter. It was as plain as a pikestaff to all the saloon that what is called a "situation" of some sort was blowing up.

Then Mrs. Hichens, the landlady, came round and asked me to have one with her, and of course I accepted, and the three ports went, I suppose to my head. I was excited by my audience, and I was killing myself inside to think what George would think if he had known about my goings-on in the store in the morning, and I had embarked on a long story which was meant to be funny—when, in the looking-glass opposite, I caught sight of the other man's face. He was looking at the woman. . . . I set down my glass and walked out.

It was not until later that I realised we did not speak a word on the way home, and then I did not blame George for being disgusted with me. But I did not think a thing about it at the time. I could think of nothing but the look on that man's face, and the shock it had given me; for he was dead to the world, there was no question about it.

I wonder if it was reaction from Harry that gave me a sort of horror of a certain look in a man's eyes? To this day I can't bear to see a man looking at a woman in that fashion, as if he was asking her to beat him. I can't endure to see a man stripped by passion, as that man was, of his personal dignity; losing all the grandeur of the male, becoming ridiculous, because he is in love, cringing and fawning and belly-aching because he wants a woman to let him possess her. It hurts me, in some way I don't know how to describe: a kind of mixture of pity and contempt and downright loathing; it rouses a cruelty in me which I resent, because in the ordinary way I know it is not there. I don't believe in Father Christmas

and I don't believe in the Hollywood he-man; I have no use for the type that's always showing you the hair on his chest. And yet I can't get away from the old-fashioned idea that man is meant to be the master. It's a pipe-dream, of course; in nine cases out of ten of the marriages I have known, the woman wears the pants. I suppose I did myself; and yet I should have hated Harry to be conscious of it.

I have seen a woman abandoning herself to love, and in some way being ennobled by it; but I have never seen a man go over the edge without making himself absurd, and it is always my instinct to keep him, if I can, from making an exhibition of himself. And I could not get over the fact that I had been admiring that man, and comparing him with George, to the latter's disadvantage, and then he could go and make a fool of himself in that way for all the world to see. I remembered that although George loved me no less, I am sure, than the other fellow loved his woman, he had never let me see him grovel, or lose his self-control, or get that silly, wet look in his eyes, like a mongrel asking for a bone. And I was ashamed of the way I treated him, and wanted to do something to make up for it, and didn't know what. For, of course, the only real reparation I could make was to say, "George, I'll marry you"; and I knew I could never face the idea of marriage again.

CHAPTER SIX

"YOU are a dam' fool, Timson; why don't you qualify?"

This was Dr. Remington, two years later—the same one that Alice had spoken of as having married a rich wife and set up in Harley Street. He remembered both of us from the Cottage Hospital, and he had put a lot of work in Alice's way. Me, naturally, he did not approve of, but Alice had asked him, as a favour, to look over a case I had taken over for her, and that was the reason of the outburst. I grinned, and said I was no good at book work.

"Too damned lazy, that's all," he snorted. We were in Alice's front parlour, which she had cleared and refitted as a

clinic. "I never have time to entertain visitors," she said, "and if I can get some of the patients to come here, it will save me both time and money." There was the high bed, an armchair, hand-basin with H. and C., an enamel cabinet or two and a little corner curtained off, for the patients to use as a dressing-room. The new electrical apparatus, with its batteries, stood in another corner; it had cost Alice a great deal of money, and she still said she believed more in the hand massage than in mechanical friction. I was not allowed to touch it, of course.

The patient had gone, Alice was out, and Dr. Remington and I were just having a cup of tea I had made in the kitchen.

"You know, you are the most incredible ass, Timson," he went on. "You might make a small fortune. You've got the right personality, as well as the right hands for the work. In point of fact, as personality goes, you're better than Logan." (He had a habit of calling us both by our surnames, which sometimes annoyed Alice—stiffer than I about etiquette. "Why on earth can't it be 'Mrs.' if it isn't 'Nurse'?" she used to say. I rather liked the breeziness; half the patients already called me "Tim" or "Timmy.") "She's inclined to intimidate people, but they look on you as a pal."

I said I was glad to hear it.

"You mark my word," he said, "the hours of you unqualified people are numbered, and if the L.C.C. carries out its threat of licensing the massage establishments, you'll be cooling your heels. It's bound to come. More and more people are going in for that"—he pointed to the new apparatus. "The massage clinic of the future is going to look like an electrical engineering shop, and we can't have amateurs like you pottering about with power. Think it over." He slapped down his cup and saucer and went to the door, turning round when he got there to say, "By the way, I've given your name to a woman who may get in touch with you; I had to tell her you weren't qualified, of course."

This made me sit up, for Dr. Remington had never sent me any patients. I kept my voice cool as I asked him what the case was.

"Oh, just one of those fools with more money than sense." He gave me a few simple details, and ended by saying, as if

it did not matter, "You can ask her a guinea a time; it'll help her to believe in you."

"But why don't you send her to Mrs. Logan?" I wondered what Alice would make of this; guinea an hour treatments were not so common.

"If you want to know, because 'Mrs. Logan' (he pulled a face at me) won't encourage her to talk about herself, and butter her up and—tell her a risky story now and again! That's all she wants; and if she's willing to pay a guinea for it, somebody may as well profit. 'Mrs.' Logan," he threw at me as a parting shot, "is too good a masseuse to waste on that rubbish!"

I suppose it is time I was saying something about that career of mine—which, up to the summer of 1914, just before the war broke out, was hardly worth calling a career. I was devilling for Alice, and I had one or two children I was treating for spinal weakness. It was very hard work, all the same, and, between ourselves, I was beginning to find it dull. I felt I knew more than I was allowed to use, and, for another thing, the money was not coming in as fast as I had hoped.

Any one who has children at school knows that fees and clothing are only the beginning of the expenses, and although Miss Cleveland was very good, and kept down the extras, there was first Kathleen's teeth, which had started to grow all crooked in front, then Jo developed a cyst on her head that needed a little operation; and what with wear and tear and replacements, I was no better off than I had been before. At least I had the comfort of knowing that the girls were being well looked after, and that they were happy at Egham.

There's no question about it: environment means everything to children. I never saw such a change in any one as I saw in Kathleen, when George and I went down, on the last Sunday in the term. They had had their end-of-term play the Thursday before, and of course I was invited, but I would not go because I felt sure it would be smart, and I had nothing to wear. But I took George down on the Sunday, because I had always promised to show him the school, and I knew Miss Cleveland would understand.

I am sorry to say that, so far as George was concerned, it was not a great success. Some other parents turned up, and—

I can't bear saying it, but he didn't fit. George, with his bowler hat, the button chrysanthemum in his lapel and his brown kid gloves, was just too much of a gentleman. Beside the informality of the others, his manners made him seem as if he was done up in brown paper and string, as tight as one of his own parcels. He called the ladies "madam," and handed cups and opened doors—but always as if he was saying, "Look how nicely I'm doing this." And every now and then he would look at me, as if for my approval, and I would nod and turn my head away quickly, to hide the tears in my eyes; for I saw several people smiling, and they were not nice smiles, like the people in *The Copper Kettle*. They made me furious on George's account—and, I may as well admit it: I was a bit anxious about the girls, in case we were making a bad impression that would affect their position in the school.

But, bless my soul, I need not have worried; children never see anything, and Kay (as they called her) and Jo were so delighted to see us, we might have dropped our aitches all over the place, so far as they were concerned. Kathleen came running up to me like any happy little girl with no shadow on her mind, and I noticed at once that the tone of her voice was softer, and she had lost her bit of cockney accent. She was always a little mimic, and she had picked up already not only the voices but the manners of the people around her. She was still inclined to slouch, but I saw one of the mistresses touch her on the shoulder, and she straightened up at once, like a dart. Her inclination to show off helped her, I dare say. And as for Jo, she was just like a fat brown puppy in a hamper of other puppies; after the first minute or two, she was back with her playfellows, and it fairly tickled George and me, the little notice she took of us!

I was nicer to George on the way home than I had ever been in my life. Mind you, he was so sweet-natured, I should be surprised if he had noticed a thing; but I could not help thinking of those snobs patronising him and sneering at him behind his back; it got my hackles up. And I was touched to the heart when he said:

"Kathleen's another kid, Rose. I couldn't have felt prouder if she'd been my own."

I could almost have cried. It made me feel that if ever

the girls grew up to be ashamed of George, I'd disown them. But there is better stuff in them than that, thank goodness, and though Kathleen went through a conceited patch when she was getting on too well with her studies, she came out of it, and Jo always loved old George, and, I'm afraid, teased him as much as her mother did.

It was queer, that very day, when I was feeling so warmly about George, something happened to show me that affection is not enough, and that, although I had almost been in the mood to give up everything for him, in reality we were poles apart. It was just one of those silly things that swing up and sting you across the face, like the twig of a nut-tree.

It was some time since George told me that the house he shared with his mother was condemned, and they would have to move before very long; and then that he had found the new one, down one of the roads within easy distance of the shop. It was called "Kosy Kot." I gave George a bit of a look, but it did not seem to register, so presently I said quietly, "And what are you going to call it?" He said comfortably that he didn't think he'd change the name, his mother liked it, and it was easier for the postman. I thought I would leave it to another time to suggest that it might be nice to have a fresh name; in fact, that in that particular road, where all the houses were "Kandahar" or "Khartoum" or "Bengal Lodge" (it had been a regular Anglo-Indian colony), it would be even rather smart to call his house by its number, written out full, if he liked, "Twenty-four," or whatever it was, which would look quite well on the gate.

He had asked me several times to walk round with him and have a look at it, but on Sunday afternoons, the only time when we were both free, I usually had too many odds and ends of washing and stitching, writing to the girls and giving myself a shampoo and manicure, to go out. This afternoon, however, when he suggested we might go round that way from the station, I had not the heart to refuse.

All the way there, George was lyrical. He never had the faintest power of description, so I would not have gathered from anything he said whether it was large, small, square, oblong, Gothic or modern. It was "a grand little place," "what he'd been looking for," "just his style" and he'd "got it for a song." I suppose I could have dragged from him, if

I had asked questions, whether it was semi-detached, how many floors there were, if there was any "outlook"; but I felt I could not stem George's eloquence (such as it was), or interrupt his beaming satisfaction and pride that straightened his back and gave his head quite a cocky angle for once! I like to see a man pleased with himself, and I suppose he must have told me twenty times between the station and the house that it was "a treat" and I'd "be surprised."

I was. When George stopped and pointed, and said in a voice like a sort of modest trumpet blast, "There you are!" I was speechless.

It was a pig of a house. The man who designed it thought he'd be Gothic, and then went Elizabethan. He clapped imitation black-and-white boarding on a mid-Victorian gable and drove a sash window into the middle of it. You saw at a glance that every inch was shoddy, and done for show. There were red brick, rough-cast and stucco in the front elevation, and the first storey was divided into panels with wooden laths painted a chocolate brown, with a purple brick diamond in the middle of each panel.

"Well, what do you think?" George's voice was positively trembling with pride.

"I'm glad you've found something you like, George," was the only thing I found to say. And all the time we were tramping over that frightful house, which, as you can imagine, was a mass of "inglenooks" and "cosy corners" and window seats made out of plywood ("That'll just suit mother, for her ferns"), I was stunned by the thought, George really likes this. Out of all the nice, plain, unpretentious houses which could be had, even in that neighbourhood, at reasonable prices, he had chosen this horror, which was good for nothing but to make the foundations of a Fifth of November bonfire.

God knows, I don't mean to set myself up in any way as George's superior. I suppose we had had similar educations, but education is like vaccination; it either "takes" or it doesn't. It had "taken" in George to the extent of reading books I would never have opened; he was quite a bookworm in his way. But I think, on that awful Sunday afternoon in "Kosy Kor," I got a glimmering of the difference between culture and education, and how one matters and the other isn't worth a damn, unless you have got the first on top of it. Education

is just learning other people's ideas, and taking them for granted, while culture is taste, and the power to choose for yourself among the good and the bad. I suppose my taste was trained, without my knowing it, by those old brick houses in the High Street at Crowle, and even in my girlhood I knew enough to laugh at the *épergne* and the bear. (How George would have loved that bear; he would have said it "just put the finishing touch" to the hall.)

I realised that, although you might live very happily with somebody who had no education, in the book sense, it would be downright impossible to live with somebody who was blind to ugliness. You would be like the man in the fairy tale who had to wear a shirt made of stinging nettles: in a constant state of irritation.

Sad as I was at this discovery about George, it was satisfactory in another way; for I had better confess that, since the work wasn't going as I had expected, and the money wasn't coming in, and I was still in debt, I had had several moments of weakness. In fact, I had almost got to the point of deciding that if he ever asked me again, I would marry him. It seemed as if a woman could not make her way alone, and I knew George would be "comfortable" when his mother died. "Kosy Kot" settled that nonsense for good, and I am sure it was a mercy, for we would never have been as happy as husband and wife as we were in being friends. As it turned out, he never asked me again; perhaps he would not risk another snub, but more likely he paid me the compliment of thinking I knew my own mind.

I was so relieved at what I then looked on (and still do) as my "escape," that I was able to be quite nice to George about "Kosy Kot." In fact, I had to hold myself back from suggesting fresh horrors which dear old George would have accepted in good faith, simply because they were my ideas. I believe if I had told him to paint the parlour pea-green and put up fretwork brackets, he would have done it, and sat there, happy to think that if he had not got my presence, at least he had my notions of decoration to keep him company. So I behaved myself, and never even mentioned the iron balcony I'd thought of for outside his mother's window, where that flea-bitten fox-terrier bitch of hers could take the air without endangering the virginity which kept old Mrs. Glaize in a perpetual

state of panic. I made a few modest suggestions for the improvement of the more hideous of the outer "features": colouring the whole house cream, including the purple brick diamonds, and just keeping the window frames and doors a plain dark brown. Which George promised should be done. Unfortunately, Mrs. Glaize preferred the patchwork effect, so, as the house was supposed to be for her, it was left in all its native horror. She only lived three or four years after they moved in; and then the girls and I started the campaign of persuading George that "Kosy Kot" was too large for him, that ended, after his retirement (nearly twenty years later), in the bungalow at Birling Gap.

I was still living in the one room (it wasn't a bad one) because each time I thought of moving, something cropped up that put any increase of expenses out of the question; and all sorts of arrangements were made for the girls in the holidays. I generally managed to have them for a few days with me: Jo in my bed and Kathleen on the two armchairs and a stool—she was stretching out like pump water—which they both looked on as a picnic, and great fun; but most of the time they were farmed out—sometimes with Hetty's people; her father was a gardener on a big estate in Shropshire. It took a lot of planning, and it meant I did not see nearly as much of them as I would have liked. But beggars cannot be choosers, and as they both seemed, on the whole, to be happy and healthy, I tried not to make myself miserable about them.

Then came the war, out of which so many people made fortunes: and, although I did not come anywhere near that, I am afraid the war, so far as we were concerned, was a blessing in disguise. It's queer to think that if I had taken Dr. Remington's advice, and perhaps got a diploma, it would have done me no good. I should have felt obliged to go into one of the war hospitals, like Alice, been worked off my feet and stranded high and dry in 1918, without even my practice to come back to. I sometimes wondered if I ought to offer to do some war work, but there was no conscription of women in the last war, and I felt it was my duty to the girls to take the first chance of making real money that had ever come my way. I should put in here that Alice's husband had died very suddenly, the April before the war, and Alice went away (she was sent up to a military hospital in Yorkshire,

where there was not the least chance of her keeping in touch with any of her patients), telling me I could have the use of her clinic, paying her whatever rent I could afford, and that I could help myself to any of her patients who were willing to come to me—on the understanding, of course, that she would take over again as soon as the war was over. I don't think she would have done it if she could have found a trained locum, who would pay her a percentage on the takings; but the few masseurs who had not joined up were already doing overtime; most of them were in the West End, and it was a long way out to Streatham Common, round about which most of Alice's patients were situated

I had a good look through Alice's case-book after she went away, picking out the ones who were "worth while" and discarding the small fry. It sounds cold-blooded and unprofessional, but I was out for one thing only: to make money and to get a roof over my head. I discovered that Alice did a good deal of work that was practically non-profitmaking, and I cut this out ruthlessly. When I was rich I would go in for charity; I would go to poor houses in back streets and rub children's spines for them; I would give a girl who had won a scholarship for Holloway a free course to help her with the pain that came between her shoulders after hours of study; I'd show the little typist in the council offices how to get rid of the pain in her hip.

But until I had made Kathleen and Jo safe, I would not look at anybody who could not afford to pay me a guinea each time. You see, I had found out how easily such money could be earned. Dr. Remington's introduction had taken me into another world, and now was my chance to exploit it. Alice curled her lip when she heard about my case in Hertford Street. "If you once start with that class of work, you'll have your time filled up." "Well, that suits me," I told her. "I'd sooner save myself for the cases that are worth while," she answered. I thought, That's all very well, but I can't afford to be idealistic. It was different for Alice; she had no one but herself to support—now Bob was gone.

Dr. Remington was right about Mrs. Carpenter. There was nothing the matter with her at all, except that her metabolism was shocking—due to lack of exercise, over-eating, and, par-

ticularly, over-drinking. The first time I was shown into her bedroom, her greeting was typical. The room stank of spirits, perfume and the powder she covered her body with. She had a mania for powder; I had to dredge her with it before I rubbed her, until she looked like some sort of a desiccated-coconut bun. There was powder over everything: in the bedclothes, on the carpet, all over the dressing-table—even in the cup of black coffee she was drinking when I was shown in.

"Good-morning. Dr. Remington says you don't know a thing about massage; you've got a nerve to charge a guinea!"

I burst out laughing. I never can stiffen up when people are rude for no reason. I paid her back in her own coin.

"If I knew more, you wouldn't get me for a guinea!"

Apparently that suited her. She fiddled and faddled about, wasting time, until I had to remind her it was getting late, and I had another appointment. Then we set to work, and I soon had her yelping like a spaniel. Some people yelp because it hurts and others because they are enjoying it; Mrs. Carpenter belonged in the second class.

It was a brute of a bed to work on, broad and low, with one of those spongy mattresses that give to every movement; I was aching in every muscle when I straightened up and told her that was all for the day.

"All! But we've only had twenty minutes. You're not going to have the cheek to charge me a guinea for twenty minutes."

"My guinea runs from the time I come into your house to when I walk out of it," I told her. I saw this was one of the instances where I was going to have to put my foot down. She swore at me a bit—but it was the last and only time she questioned my fee. Sometimes she wouldn't be massaged; she would keep me chatting and gossiping when I wished she would let me go, because I could have done a bit of shopping, or run into the hairdresser's for a set. But it meant a guinea whether I worked or not, and I got to look on it as money easily earned. It was nothing to her, and a great deal to me. I decided to look for some more Mrs. Carpenters, and I knew that in war-time, with money rolling in the gutter, they would not be hard to find.

She was very generous, too, about introducing me to her friends. Some women would as soon give away the name of their masseuse as of the "little woman" who makes up their gowns from sketches stolen from the big fashion houses. But like most people who are too idle to live, Mrs. Carpenter was very good-natured. If she lost her temper, it was over in a minute; she simply could not be bothered to remember. As I became one of her favourites, she was always pressing me to lunch, or go to a movie, or just out shopping with her. At first I refused these invitations, but then I began to think it might be good policy to accept some of them. She always introduced me to people who came in as "That devil Timmy," or "Here's Timmy—the old cow!" which was meant to indicate that I was not just her masseuse, but a personal friend.

I knew that if I was going to move in Mrs. Carpenter's circle, or even meet her friends occasionally, I must have some clothes; I positively hadn't a stitch I could have worn at a smart luncheon party. Although I took a lot of care of my things, I was really shabby by now and I particularly needed a good tailormade, although I knew that would not show up for much among the sables and minks! I had only one overcoat, too, which had to serve as a mackintosh; I saw Mrs. Carpenter look at it one day, and decided to leave it in the hall in future, and go upstairs just in my dress and cardigan. She was quite right; it was not the sort of garment to bring into a room like hers.

One day, just before Christmas, I got a parcel, and inside it was a dark brown musquash coat from Mrs. Carpenter! I had never had such a present in my life, and I didn't know whether to keep it or to act proud and send it back. Before the end of that war, musquash was to be as common as rabbit; Mrs. Carpenter used to say, "If you don't get rid of that damned coat, Timmy, I'll tear it off your back!" She wanted to give me a mole, but I would not let her; the musquash was more serviceable and it was a beautiful, rich brown, more like sable than the other fur; I thought when it was beginning to wear shabby it would cut up into a jacket for Kathleen. You see, I quite took it for granted I would be buying fur coats for myself in a few years' time!—and I had set my heart on a little miniver set for Jo.

Anyhow, I felt smart enough to go anywhere, with my musquash, a new little hat that only cost a few shillings at Berridge's, and a pair of gloves with a scarf to match that seemed to find their way accidentally into my bag when I was out shopping. I may say that, when I got home and looked at them, I took myself up sharply. "Now, Rose Timson," I told myself, "the time has come for you to give up that game. You are starting out all over again, as a respectable woman"; a resolution which I kept. The scarf and gloves were the end of my light-fingered adventures.

I went over to Egham to see the girls, and I thought Kathleen would have a fit; she was ten now, and mad on clothes. And I let George take me to the Empire one night—and the fur coat gave him such a shock, he bought me an orchid to wear on my lapel! They say money attracts money. Dear old George; he would have been the last to look at it that way, but he would certainly never have bought me an orchid to wear on my old tweed overcoat—and quite rightly too.

We did not go to the Haymakers that night; we went to a rather swell new place that had opened near the bus stop. The lounge was full of officers and their tarts, and every one was drinking cocktails, which neither of us liked as much as our port; but, to be in the fashion, George ordered White Ladies. It was very noisy, and I could see George was thinking wistfully about the parlour at the Haymakers; but I felt excited with everything. It was an omen of the change coming into our lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LET'S FACE IT; that was a good war for me. I had nobody close to me fighting, and although I used to find myself crying over the casualty lists, it wasn't personal; it was just a general sort of sadness for the waste of young lives and the fine lads that ought to have been seeing to the next generation. Not that they did not do their best, in the short time they had. War babies right and left—and they were not confined to the working class girls, either. I heard enough in my new circles about rush weddings and hurried journeys to distant parts of the country and "arrangements"—and worse. I got to know the little pinched, hunted look on the face of a girl who had only left her finishing school a few months before, and the next thing was she was having a "nervous breakdown" somewhere in the north of Scotland. Even one of my own patients got involved in it.

I went in one morning and found her hysterical.

"My own Stella, Timmy!—What on earth am I to do?—Don't you know anybody . . .

I was always being asked "if I knew anybody," and of course, in the course of my work, I had picked up an address or two, but I never gave them unless I felt it was desperate. The English law had made that game too dangerous and the methods were too crude; I knew of cases where the shock had done more harm than the operation itself.

I was even sorrier for those girls than I was for the working girls who "got into trouble," because, among many of the working classes, although an illegitimate baby is a disgrace, it is lived down in time. If a girl is brave and faces it out, she is quite likely to find a man willing to marry her. The days when she had no choice between "carrying a secret to her grave" or putting herself in the river were over, even in 1916, and although there were some miserable old hags who tried to make an unmarried mother's life unbearable, the feeling of most decent people was all for giving her a chance.

It was different in the circles I was now moving among. The moral side did not worry them—most of them; but what

would the servants think? The butler could not be expected to take messages and the housemaids carry up trays while Miss Betty was having her baby in the best spare room! And her marriage chances were gone, because the heir to ancestral acres couldn't be made to share nurseries with a little by-blow that came of one more cocktail than Miss Betty was used to carrying and missing the last train home. It was not all that way either. From what I saw, I believe there were no more cocktail babies in Betty's class than there were children conceived in one last, heart-broken gesture of generosity to the boys they loved and might never see again: children they would have treasured and cherished, and were forced to give up, either before or after they were born, to the conventions of the society to which they belonged. Those were the girls I was most truly sorry for: the Dance-little-ladies of the last war, who were nothing but the victims of the total breakdown of the old conventional system in which they were brought up and had neither knowledge nor experience to see them through the conditions of war-mad England.

And although I sometimes thanked God I had not a son to put into Kitchener's war machine, I was even more thankful that Kathleen and Jo were too little even to know of the crazy whirl into which other women's daughters were being carried, and on whose edge I now moved—although only as a spectator.

Mrs. Carpenter's friends were smart, good-time women, whose husbands were connected with the stock exchange or the theatre in peace-time, and had either got themselves brass hats of sorts or found nice, cushy jobs in armaments. In their absence the wives killed time with wounded officers, boys on leave and getting up dances, cabaret shows, bridge parties and fancy fairs for war charities. You might say they wore themselves out in the service of their country; and that was to provide a rich harvest for me.

I suppose they were a silly, light-headed set, but they did very little harm. There has to be this element in war-time society, and they were too conscious of which side their bread was buttered on to let their flirtations carry them away. The boys they kissed and danced with could not buy them the sables and diamonds their husbands kept them in, although they might manage champagne and oysters for a forty-eight

hours' "binge." Many a youth went back to the trenches feeling he had had a whacking good leave, thanks to them, and they set up none of the mean competition with the town girls that had started among the real Smart Set. They actually had some of the characteristics of barmaids, without the barmaids' wisdom and good sense, and just the same tough streak when it came to what they probably did not even think of as their "virtue."

Virtue is a funny thing; I've never got down to defining it. In my opinion, every person's virtue is a private matter of her own, and trying to fit one person's virtue to another is as crazy as making a standard suit of clothes that will fit everybody. If it does for one in fifty it is a pure accident, and it will bag or drag on the rest. People are too fond of tying up virtue with sexual morals; I can't see it has any more to do with them than it has with over-eating.

In less than six months after I met Mrs. Carpenter, I had my hands full with women who spent twenty-three out of the twenty-four hours abusing their digestive systems and wearing out their nerves, and expected me to put them right in thirty minutes. I had insomniacs, hysterics and dipsos, most of whom could have done with a month in a nursing home, and would have been better for a few weeks of country life and some healthy out-door exercise. But no; they weren't going to let themselves in for the discipline of a cure, they only wanted "relaxing"; most of them would not even stand for a pummelling—as a matter of fact, their nerves were in such rotten condition, they could not take it. They wanted to lie with their eyes shut, babbling or whining about their love affairs, like women in a hairdresser's parlour, while I rubbed the backs of their necks or kneaded their shoulder muscles. By the end of the day I used to be sick of the sight of lumps of white female flesh, that ought to have been firm and rosy and resilient, and went into dinges as soon as you pressed a finger into it. The awful truth about my own sex hit me between the eyes each time I saw a woman walk in, looking like a Paquin doll, all taut and smart, and the minute she got her corset and brassière off. drop into a bladder of fat and broken-down muscle. How they could ever let another woman see them, let alone a man, beat me. They would not diet, or even cut down on their drinking, their sweets and cigarette-

smoking; they expected massage to do everything for them, and when I told them it would not, they would say, "Oh, well, never mind; all I want is something to soothe my nerves."

I suppose I had—have—got a special quality of touch; I never thought of my "map," but it seemed as if I could suck up the pain, or the tension, or whatever it was, with the tips of my fingers. I was now booking eight or even ten cases a day, and working week-ends as well, for on Sundays I still had several "real" cases: a hospital matron with a chronic affection of the hip joint, who had been one of Alice's "specials," and a young actress who was wearing herself out with eight performances a week and floor shows twice nightly. The work was gruelling, but I was as tough as a horse, and I meant to make hay while the sun shone.

The time had come, at last, for me to look for a house, and you know what it is like, getting a house in war-time. Rents were asked and premiums demanded for jerry-built boxes that would have got you something off Knightsbridge before 1914. I had made up my mind to move up West, for most of my patients, now, were round Mayfair or Kensington, and the dark streets and Victoria crowded every night with the troop trains made the journey home a great deal of an effort at the end of a hard day's work; besides, one was always getting caught in Zeppelin raids and obliged to spend hours down in the Tubes, instead of getting back comfortably to one's own bed.

I was massaging a friend of Mrs. Carpenter's one afternoon: a woman I did not much care for, although I could not have told you why. She was always polite and considerate, and she was one of the few in that gang who wanted a real treatment. Mrs. Carpenter had tipped me off to charge her twenty guineas for a course of twelve, which she paid on the nail without a murmur: which surprised me when I got to know her, and found out she was a very sharp business woman, always keen on getting value for her money.

I had just finished with Mrs. Thesiger, on this particular afternoon, and she had just got on her dressing-gown and was sipping the hot lemon and water she always had after her treatment, when the telephone rang and she picked it up. I was putting on my gloves, just ready to go, but the transmission was very loud, and I distinctly heard the voice at the

other end say "Carton and Olliver," which was the name of a firm of house agents in Pimlico to whom I had been once or twice, without, however, finding anything that suited me on their books.

"Oh, lord," Mrs. Thesiger was saying, "I ought to have rung you up before. I told those people they could have the house. No, not the one at Lancaster Gate; the little one, in Plymouth Street. Well, I can't help it if they didn't let you know. They'll have to see you about the lease, anyhow. And look here: they're paying me a hundred and forty pounds. Yes, that's what I got out of them! I always say you house agents don't know your business."

The person at the other end said something, and Mrs. Thesiger laughed derisively.

"Of course it's fifty pounds more than it's worth, but there's a war on, isn't there? If people want a thing, they'll pay anything. The man's been offered a job or something, and if they can't get a house in town he'll have to turn it down. Oh, don't ask me what it's about," said Mrs. Thesiger. "Invalid wife, young family—I don't know; I've got my hundred and forty and if I hadn't been a mug it might have been more!" I could tell from the way she spoke that she really did feel she had been a mug, and that she was vexed about it.

I knew Plymouth Street; it was one of the little streets of superior working class houses that lie behind the King's Road. Dressmakers and furriers lived there, and the small, flat-faced houses with area railings and steps up to the front doors looked spruce and neat. Something about their nice proportions and the good placing of their windows and doors reminded me of Crowle, although, by comparison, the Plymouth Street houses were very modest and humble, and the old High Street people would have looked on them as slums. I knew Mrs. Thesiger was a crook for asking a hundred and forty pounds a year for one of them, but, as it happened, she was only a little ahead of her time, for, from the time we went there, the rents mounted steadily, and now half the doors are painted bright blue or yellow, which shows that people like writers and B.B.C. announcers have got hold of them. Plymouth Street has gone up in the world; but, at the time of which I am speaking, it was just a respectable little street, within reach of a good shopping centre.

By the time she put down the receiver, I had made up my mind.

"I'll give you a hundred and sixty for your house, Mrs. Thesiger."

"What?"

It took quite a time to persuade her I was serious. I told her I wanted a place nearer my connection, and somewhere to have the girls with me in their holidays. As soon as she realised I was in earnest, she began to mumble about the rent being really low for war-time; which made me laugh outright.

"You forget I was here when you were talking to Carton and Olliver!—and it means you're getting your treatments for nothing."

That was the way to talk to Mrs. Thesiger; she started to laugh as well.

"You are an old fox, Timson!" she told me. "But what am I to do about that man—whatever his name was? I did promise it to him——"

I looked her straight in the eye. She had very remarkable eyes, dark grey, with a ring of thin gold round them. They were shaped like a cat's eyes, and just about as trustworthy.

"Mrs. Thesiger," I said to her. "You're a very successful woman—in more ways than one. You aren't going to tell me that success has come to you by keeping promises when they were against your own interests?"

Luckily, she took it, as I intended her to do, as a compliment. When I left the house I had got a home for Kathleen and Jo, and an address that would look *solid* at the head of my notepaper. I had also learned a lot about people like Mrs. Thesiger. I knew her respect for me had mounted, since I had persuaded her to do a mean and disreputable thing, and I knew that there was a class of people among whom honour did not count, and if one meant to get on among them, one had to play their game, and show oneself smarter at it than they were themselves. And I despised Mrs. Thesiger for breaking her word for the sake of a paltry twenty pounds. I would be more expensive than that, when it came to my turn.

I did not tell George how I came by the house in Plymouth Street; I merely mentioned I had got it. He was depressed about my moving so far away, but, like the good, faithful, old

watchdog he was, he only said that if there was any way he could help, he hoped I would let him do it.

"I'll soon have to be looking out for another school for Kathleen; she's getting too old for The Lodge."

I was worried about Kathleen again; she was showing signs of being brainy, and, to be honest, I did not know what I would do with a brainy daughter. I meant to have both the girls trained for something, in case they did not marry, but, deep down, I hoped I would keep them with me until they found husbands. I thought Kathleen, who was clever with her pencil, might go in for fashion drawing, and Jo for the domestic. I was really upset when Miss Cleveland told me that I should be looking out for another school for Kathleen, that would carry on the type of teaching she had had at The Lodge, and give her the sort of higher education every one seemed to think she should be getting.

George was looking at me. He said, in a puzzled kind of voice:

"You know, Rose, you're altering."

"Don't be silly, George." But he was dead right. I was toughening up in a way I never expected in my life. You have seen how I was soft and silly over Harry, not even getting my just dues out of him, because I did not want to cripple whatever future might lie before him. But I was learning things from those women among whom, now, I spent the greater part of my time. You might think they had not much to teach: that they were stupid, cheap, brassy—and so they were. There was hardly a well-bred specimen among them; most of them were by Money out of Money, except for the few who had made lucky marriages, and these were always a bit on the defensive, anxious not to let it appear that they had not been brought up in the circumstances in which they now found themselves. They were all the Hotel Metropoles and all the flash country clubs and all the Monte Carlos rolled into one, and most of them had not any sort of taste except in their clothes and their houses, which other people decorated for them; and then they generally managed to spoil the effect with too many diamonds and the expensive rubbish they seemed to pick up like jackdaws, wherever they went.

But they showed me what money could accomplish, as well as how it could be misused, and old George was right, although

I would not admit it. As a matter of fact, we were farther apart than we had ever been, during this transition period of mine, when I was getting rid of the old Rose Timson and trying on a new one of whose fit, to begin with, I was not perfectly sure. I expect a snake in the act of sloughing its skin is not very companionable; it feels shabby, and touchy, and uneasy about the future. That is how I was with George; his caution exasperated me, his ideas were small-town, and I could have screamed with irritation at his narrow, excellent honesty, in which I always suspected criticism of myself and my methods. Dear old George; what an injustice I did him. I believe he would have backed me through murder; he would have done it desperately, unhappily, in a cold sweat of fear—but not for himself; for me.

We chatted on, rather stiffly, about the new house; I wanted some plumbing done, and then there would be the decorating, for the paint and paper had not been touched for years, by the look of them—and, of course, the furnishing. George listened solemnly, and kept putting down figures on a sheet of paper.

"It's going to cost you something. I tell you what, Rose; I know a fellow who's at the head of the decorating at Stokes and Sewell; how'd it be if I asked him to look after you? I know Plummer'd see they did the square thing by a friend of mine."

I am ashamed to this day of the way I answered him; but something boiled up in me, and I felt myself go crimson as a turkeycock at his lack of understanding of me and of the new way I was proposing to plan my life.

"Thank you, George; but I don't want the girls brought up on fumed oak standards! I'm not putting my house in the hands of some potty suburban firm that deals in plush suites and oxydised copper fitments! I've practically fixed with a Bond Street firm for the bathroom, and I've seen the sort of stuff I want for the rest of the house." So I had, and the prices had made my head swim, but I had the bit in my teeth. Houses like Mrs. Carpenter's and Mrs. Thesiger's—although I neither wanted nor hoped to imitate them—had given me standards that George knew nothing about.

"I see. Then I'm afraid I won't be much good to you." He sounded so hurt that I could stand it no longer; I jumped up

and said it was time I looked for a taxi—~~taxi~~ being as ordinary to me now as buses were in the old days—and we started to walk down the street towards the main road. We met a couple of the town girls I knew by sight, and I nodded to them as usual and said good-night. George looked straight ahead, as usual, and pretended not to see them, and that just touched me off.

"What a god-damned prig you are, George!" I generally took trouble to moderate my language before George; as a matter of fact, beyond a My God or so, I never used to swear; it was one of the things I had picked up in my new company, where damns and bloodies were just part of the courtesies of everyday life; and it had occurred to me I would have to take a grip on myself before the girls came home. I don't approve of swearing; as someone I got to know later used to say, it is a confession of verbal inadequacy. But my vocabulary was never very adequate, and there are moments when a good swear word is nearly as good as a benzedrine tablet for pepping you up.

George looked as if I had hit him between the eyes.

"Why, Rose . . ."

But I was all worked up, and I let him have it.

"I'll tell you something, George Glaize. It's a pity you don't take a mistress. She might make a man out of you, instead of a stuffed shirt."

I don't know what made me so cruel to him; to George, who was never anything but a kind, good friend to me. It seemed, in those days, as if our every meeting had to end in my hurting or shocking him. Perhaps, deep down, I compared him with the people I had got to know lately, and perhaps the comparison made me ashamed.

And, of course, I was overworking, which is a foolish thing in my profession. I was making a great deal of money (for me), and spending it as fast as it came in, and I knew I must find ways of making more. I now had the responsibility of the house, and that meant some sort of a housekeeper, at any rate for the holidays, because the girls could not be left by themselves all day while I was at work. So perhaps I had a lot, as they say, "on my plate," not that that is any excuse for my behaving so badly to George, whose only thought, as I very well knew, was to help me and be kind.

For a moment he did not answer. We were standing under a street lamp, and when I looked up at him, there was none of the old friendliness in his face; he looked down at me gravely, as if we were strangers. I will confess now—it turned me cold.

"Well, Rose: we don't seem to get on these days, the way we used to. I'm sorry; I don't mean to vex you, and I don't think you mean all the things you say to me. Perhaps it 'ud be better for both of us if I kept out of your way for a bit. I expect I am slow and stupid but I don't seem to get the hang of this new pace of yours—not just yet. I expect you need somebody more"—he stopped, and looked puzzled—"more *up* in things than me. But if you want anything, you know you've only to ask me. Good-night—and give my love to the girls."

I cried most of the way home. My own loneliness had come over me, and for two pence I would have told the taxi-driver to turn round and catch George up before he got to "Kosy Kot." I thought of my new pace, as he called it, and began to wonder if I could keep it up; and of the money the house was going to cost, and of the school fees which were due. But by the time the taxi stopped in front of my lodgings, I had got back my stiff upper lip, and I gave the man a shilling over the fare and said to hell with George, as I let myself in with my key.

I am quite aware I have not presented myself in a very attractive light in this part of the story, so I may as well put in the last black touches.

Next day was Sunday, and I had the actress, whose flat was in Shepherd Market, in the morning, and the matron in the afternoon. I generally took a walk across the Green Park, had my lunch in a little pub near the Houses of Parliament, and picked up my bus at the foot of Whitehall. I was surprised as I was crossing the Mall to see Hetty, dressed in her Sunday coat and hat, smiling and waving at me. She told me she had come up to see one of her brothers, who was in a war hospital, and was putting in time until the visiting hour. So I asked her to come and have lunch with me, and she coloured up with pleasure. She was a nice, unassuming girl, and it struck me she had never taken advantage of having known

us when we lived down "the street," and how she was always respectful, and how much the girls liked her.

Over lunch I told her about the new house, and nobody could have shown more interest, or been nicer in every way.

"I *am* glad! I always felt it was such a shame you couldn't have more of the children in their holidays. It's a pity when girls can't grow up with their mothers—especially when it's a mother like you, Mrs. Timson!"

"I'll still need somebody to look after them. What I really want, Hetty, is a good, dependable housekeeper—working, of course. She might need a char to help her, but I dare say that could be arranged."

"You'll want somebody motherly, won't you?" asked Hetty.

"It doesn't matter, so long as she gets on with Kathleen. Jo's all right, but young Kay's a bit of a problem!" I told her. "A good, sensible, young woman, who's fond of children." I hesitated a moment, then took the plunge. "What about you, Hetty? The girls love you, and I wouldn't have a care in the world with you to look after them."

I saw she was startled.

"But I'm with Mr. Glaize!"

"Cashiers aren't hard to find, and there'll be plenty of time for him to get suited before I want you—though I'd like you as soon as I can. You could be a lot of use while we're getting the house ready. Look, Hetty: it's a nice little house, easy to work, and I mean to make the kitchen lovely and get as many labour-saving things as I can. You'll have a bed-sitting room of your own, with a gas fire, and as I'm out so much, you will be able to plan your day to suit yourself. You've always said you're fond of housekeeping, and wanted a home of your own. This is nearly as good; why don't you try it?"

She was so long in answering that I wondered if she was thinking of getting married. Most girls in Hetty's position do, and George and I had often said she would make a good wife. She was good-natured and orderly, devoted to children and useful in the house; and yet, somehow, I saw, although George did not, that Hetty was the kind that never marries. Nice-looking, pleasant, and as free-spoken with men as with women, Hetty was just not the sort that makes a man burn, or want to keep and protect her for ever. Poor girl; I am sure she dreamed of a husband and children of her own, and

I could not be the one to tell Hetty that she was just a natural sister, and she might as well settle down cheerfully to looking after other people's houses and children. I knew she loved the girls, and I hoped she was thinking it out, but her answer, when it came, showed she had other things on her mind.

"You see, Mrs. Timson, it's like this. Mr. Glaize was very kind to me when I was miserable. I—I met him in a sort of little coffee shop——"

"Do you mean, he picked you up?" Perhaps George was not as backward as I thought! But Hetty gave me a reproachful sort of look.

"I was sitting at a table, crying, and he made me tell him what was the matter." Yes, that was George. If Hetty had to cry in front of a stranger, she couldn't, being Hetty, have picked a better specimen than George. She's in love with him, all right, I thought; and not a chance, poor kid. I thought what a fool George was, not to see that Hetty would be much more the wife for him than Rose Timson. "He couldn't offer me a job then, because he wasn't his own master, but he gave me his word . . . and you see he kept it . . . and I couldn't let him down after that, could I, Mrs. Timson?"

"Oh, come now, Hetty!" This was too much for my stomach. "You've been with George four years! He hasn't got a lien on you."

"Oh, no," said Hetty. "He's not the sort of person who would ever stand in one's way. Don't misunderstand me, please, Mrs. Timson! I'd love to come to you. You know I think the world of you and the girls, and I'd much sooner be your housekeeper than work in the shop."

"Well, that's the answer, isn't it?" Perhaps I spoke a bit impatiently, for I have always been one to make up my mind quickly, and act upon it, whether it turned out the way I expected or not. And I felt that Hetty was the solution of my problem, and was determined to have her, with or without George's consent. Not that I doubted getting it; if George held out on me over Hetty, it seemed to me his offers of help were not worth much.

"It is, in a way," she said, "and then it isn't. You see, in the business, the cashier has a good deal of responsibility, and Mr. Glaize has gone to a lot of trouble to get me into his ways and those of his customers. And I help a good deal

with the ordering and accounts; it would take quite a while to teach another girl all the things I know, and it would take up a lot of Mr. Glaize's time. You know how overworked he is already. I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Timson; but I couldn't, after the way he's treated me, walk out on Mr. Glaize."

It was then I made a mistake. I should have known Hetty was not a Mrs. Thesiger, and have altered my line of approach; but I had had a good many recent experiences of the power of money, and I think my judgment must have been clouded by my determination to get Hetty, by whatever means I could.

"What's George paying you?" I asked her abruptly.

She told me, adding that, of course, it wasn't George, it was the firm; but that he had just got her a "rise," which had surprised and pleased her very much. It was so long since I had dealt with so small a sum that I found myself wondering that any one could be persuaded to work so hard for so little money.

"Well, Hetty: you'll be living in, which is worth at least thirty shillings at present prices, and I'll give you a pound a week more than the wages you are getting, if you will give George a month's notice to-morrow."

I'll never forget the look she gave me. I think if I had been bargaining with her for her virtue, she could not have looked at me with greater horror.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Timson. Money doesn't come into it."

I knew I was wasting my breath, so I paid the bill and got up. When we said good-bye at the bus stop, I knew Hetty didn't "think the world of me" any longer. What Mrs. Thesiger would do for a paltry twenty pounds, Hetty would not do for what must have represented, to her, a small fortune. It summarised the difference between the world I was leaving and the one I would be living in in the future.

I was a bit taken aback at first; however, I soon gave myself a shake and told myself Hetty was a fool, and that I would soon find someone to jump at the offer she had turned down. I wondered if she would tell George, and what he would think? Not that that would matter, either. I had only done the kind of thing everyone was doing in those days, when each person was out for himself, and you were looked on as a simpleton if you did not snatch and grab with the rest. It only struck me when I was getting ready for bed that not

only mother, but father as well, would have been shocked at the idea of trying to buy out somebody's loyalty to her employer. Well, what of it? Crowle lay a long way behind, and perhaps—I tried to persuade myself—even father would have found himself obliged to alter his standards, if he had lived through what we looked on for twenty years as the "Great" war.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I ALWAYS remember Mrs. Thesiger's party, because it was the first invitation of the kind I accepted, and because of two contacts I made there, one of which was to influence my life for many years.

When I received the invitation, my first instinct was to refuse it: it was for the theatre, with supper afterwards, which meant a late night and (as I had not yet got into Plymouth Street) an expensive taxi-fare home. But it was for a Thursday, and I remembered Friday was a comparatively easy day.

I was working very hard and having very little pleasure, for I would not spend money on entertaining myself, and, to tell the truth, I was even missing the evenings with George at the Haymakers, or the one or two smarter pubs we had tried lately: because the Haymakers seemed to belong to a phase that was past, and somehow it embarrassed both of us to go and sit alone in the landlady's little parlour, while it would have caused comment if we had taken regularly to the saloon. It seemed easier to keep the conversation going if we were not by ourselves, but in the company of other people, and, in the sort of places we had latterly gone to, gin and French seemed more suitable than port. Gin and French is a more superficial drink than port; one can go on talking without getting intimate. That suited me, and, of course, George had fallen in with my wishes.

But after that night when we had our quarrel—if you can call it such—I did not see George for weeks, and the day I got Mrs. Thesiger's invitation happened to be a day on which I was feeling sorry for myself, and thinking that, although I was making so much money, I personally was getting very

little out of it. So I slipped into Berridge's between two of my appointments and bought a black evening gown and a long velvet coat to wear over it. I have always worn black in the evening; I'm not what they call a clever dresser, but I knew enough to realise that black is safe and dignified, and that it would not annoy the other women by clashing with what they happened to be wearing.

The women, to be candid, struck me as rather a scratch lot. Mrs. Carpenter was not of the party; Mrs. Thesiger, I knew, was not much of a success with her own sex, but she had a gift for attracting the men. Did I say she was divorced? It was rather a showy case, and, for some reason or other, she had not married the co-respondent. She was, at this time, in her late thirties, and I knew she was thinking it was time she took the plunge again. I suppose she did not want a lot of other women around to complicate matters while she was making up her mind.

There was a Mrs. Anstey, whose husband was in France, a rather plain, dull woman with no conversation; a tall, horse-faced girl whom everybody called Marjorie—she was Lady Something, but I can't remember it now; myself, Mrs. Thesiger and a woman who was introduced to me as Mrs. Wakeford. This one rather roused my curiosity; I had never met her before. She was small and rather prim in appearance, but when you came to look at her closely, she had the most dissolute face I ever saw on a woman. Her little, prudish mouth suggested all sorts of things, and she could make a look come into her eyes that made something close up tight in you. You see, I was still fairly unsophisticated, in spite of the company I had been keeping. Everybody addressed this one as Aimée, and she seemed well known to all the party except myself.

The men were a brigadier-general, whose name I forget; Archie Culmer, who had been the co-respondent in Mrs. Thesiger's divorce and had now married someone else; Lord Solness, who was her present boy friend; a Mr. do Araguay, who seemed to belong to Marjorie, and the tall, good-looking man who was presented to me as Dick Somervell, and was evidently told off as my escort for the evening. We all met at Mrs. Thesiger's flat—where she had dined *à deux* with Solness—before going to the theatre.

"I've got a box and four stalls," she told us. "It's the best I could do; people seem to be fighting to book for this show. So I think we'd better draw for how we sit—unless anybody happens to hate a box."

Nobody did, so the arrangement fell out that Mrs. Wakeford, Archie Culmer, Mrs. Thesiger, Lord Solness, Mr. Somervell and I had the box—which was a large one—while the other four went in the stalls. I always like a box; it makes a party of the evening. Solness had his car, and so had Mr. do Araguay; Mr. Somervell had kept his taxi, so he and I went off alone.

As long as I live, I think, Mr. Somervell will remain my ideal of a gentleman. Before the evening was over, I was more than half in love with him—an uncomfortable state of affairs; but when a woman reaches my present age, she appreciates friendship more than amorous relations, and that night laid the foundations of an attachment which has been one of the most valuable things in my life, and which has continued uninterrupted except for one rather painful misunderstanding, up to the present day.

In a way, he was like George; he had the same honesty, and, in a way, the same simplicity of outlook; but, of course, the circumstances of his upbringing had produced something very different from poor old George. He had the sophistication which was lacking in George, and his manners did not seem as if he put them on with his collar and tie in the morning. I never had the privilege of meeting Mr. Somervell in his pyjamas, but I feel sure if he had done, he would have taken the situation perfectly for granted, while George would have blushed himself into a bonfire. Mr. Somervell did more than any one to steady me in my new environment; instead of being shocked, he laughed at what he called my "villainies," and, instead of disapproving, he made me wonder whether, in the long run, they would pay. He had a natural disposition towards goodness, without any sort of self-righteous objection to its opposite. He always said one must know the whole of a person's circumstances before judging them, and as it was very rarely possible to do that, it was really wiser not to judge at all.

"I am very glad to meet you at last, Mrs. Timson," he told me, as the taxi dodged out of Charles Street into Piccadilly,

"although you scare me a little!—as, according to Lois"—that was Mrs. Thesiger—"you're a kind of magician."

I said, rather stiffly, that I was glad Mrs. Thesiger had given me a good character. In those days I used to find it rather difficult to reconcile my professional with my social relationships, as I very rarely met anybody, like Mr. Somervell, with whom, from the beginning, it was easy and natural to be myself.

"You're not a bit what I expected." I could tell from his voice he was laughing. "I thought a masseuse—is that what you call yourself?—must be a strapping female with bulging biceps, who treated one like a poor weakling, wilting from the hot-house!"

"It would take something to make you a weakling." I reckoned he must be over six feet, and I was not deceived by the looseness of his set-up and the slight stoop which was just natural indolence. I knew the type that never wastes an ounce of energy; it is all there, ready to be produced when the moment comes. "Why are you laughing?" I asked, for I could feel him still chuckling in the dark.

"You will probably be offended if I tell you."

"Well, there's no way of finding out, is there, unless you do?"

He said, after a little pause:

"It isn't often, you know, that one meets somebody who makes one think of sailing over the bullfinch, with a good mare under one, on a misty morning."

"Am I as countrified as all that?" I was taken by surprise, for I thought I had lost my all-healthy air of a country girl since my long time in London.

"Countrified in the right way," he pointed out. "It does one good to look at you. Don't you ever wear any make-up?"

"I look a sight in it," I found myself confiding in him. "I've got the wrong kind of skin, you know, and it makes me look like a tart. It's an infernal nuisance, especially at night, because one always starts to look haggish round about midnight."

This fairly broke the ice, and we were chatting like old friends. I liked him because he did not fall over himself, as most of the men in those days were doing, to explain why he was not in the army. It was a long time before I heard

from him, quite casually, that he had been turned down, C3, because of an injury to his knee when he was a schoolboy at Harrow; he was, now, just over enlistment age, although to look at him one would not have believed it, and he accepted with equanimity the white feathers with which he was presented by the busybody females who were one of the scourges of the last war. I heard, also, he was in the Intelligence, but this he never mentioned to me.

By the time we reached the theatre, I was telling him all about Kathleen and Jo, and he was asking me questions about them as though he had known them from babyhood.

"Don't forget I'm to meet them when they come home. A pantomime and tea at Gunter's is a necessary part of any child's education," he assured me.

When we went into the foyer, Mrs. Wakeford was standing with her hand on Archie Culmer's arm. She gave me rather a sharp look, and I wondered if she was interested in Mr. Somervell. She cracked some joke with him, which he answered rather stiffly, and I was pleased to realise he did not like her. Mrs. Thesiger and Solness joined us and we went down to the box; she looked really lovely, in a gown of verdigris green, with orchids on her shoulder, and Solness, who was a foxy little man, like a shrivelled almond in his uniform, seemed to be infatuated. Archie Culmer had had a good deal to drink, and I saw Mrs. Wakeford give his elbow a little shake, as she passed before him into the box. Her dress was a dark prune colour, of taffetas, without any trimming, and I never saw such a diamond as she wore in the front of her corsage. It was her only ornament, her arms and neck were quite bare and the flesh very white—that whiteness of pinkish moonlight that you see in some of the Italian paintings. My turn-out was matronly in comparison, although I should think she was two or three years older than I. I was just going to follow her, when Mr. Somervell caught me back. His voice was lowered, although the other four were chattering so much, it is unlikely they would have heard us.

"Do you know Mrs. Wakeford?"

"No." I was rather surprised. "I never met her before to-night."

"Good. Then I'd forget about meeting her, if I were you."

Astonished as I was, there was no opportunity of asking

what he meant—which, knowing Mr. Somervell, I doubt if he would have told me—for the overture had begun, and we were all settling into our places, the three women in front and the men behind.

I remember very little of the show, except that I was so tired, I found it hard not to keep on yawning; and once or twice it crossed my mind that I should have enjoyed it more if Mr. Somervell and I had been by ourselves. What was I, a busy, hard-working woman, doing to spend the hours when I ought to have been resting with a party of hard-boiled society people, none of whom was a friend of mine, and most of whom I did not even like? I did not care for Mrs. Thesiger, as I have said already; I disliked Mrs. Wakeford more and more as the night went on, although she seemed to go out of her way to be agreeable to me. "Marjorie" seemed to be all right, and I never got a word out of Mrs. Anstey the whole evening. Mr. do Araguay (Mr. Somervell referred to him as "Marjorie's dago") had something to do with one of the legations, but I don't care for Latins; they always seem to be undressing you, and, although I could probably stand up to the test as well as any of the other women in the party, his toffee-apple eyes and the shiny look of his lips irritated me. The brigadier-general was a fearful old bore, only interested in fox hunting; Lord Solness, of course, took no notice of anybody but Mrs. Thesiger, and Archie Culmer got more and more tipsy as the night went on.

In the interval they all went out to the bar. Mr. Somervell stood up and put his hand on the back of my chair.

"You go with the others," I said. "Don't mind me."

"Can I fetch you anything? A whisky and soda?"

"No, thanks. I've got a hard day's work before me; I don't want to drink any more."

"Neither do I, for the present." He sat down again, and offered me a cigarette. "I expect we shall have to do our share at supper."

"What did you mean by what you said just now, about Mrs. Wakeford?" I asked him.

"Oh—nothing. Just a suggestion." His teeth flashed in a very pleasant smile.

"Who is she? I don't know anything about her."

"You might ask Mrs. Thesiger sometime." He turned his

head, and gave me so curious a look that I lifted my eyebrows.

"Well?"

"You're a very innocent person for your age, aren't you?"

The way he said it made me innocent for a moment. I almost felt, as I sat there, wondering what to answer, as if I really was one of those nice, protected women of Mr. Somervell's world. For I knew instinctively that he did not belong in Mrs. Thesiger's gang, although he appeared to have strayed among them for the night. I answered slowly: "I don't know what you mean by 'innocent.' I've had a divorce and I earn my own living; one doesn't do that, in these days, by 'innocence.'"

His smile brushed the subject aside.

"I wish you'd do something for me."

"Well, what is it?"

"I wish you would let me take you to see a cousin of mine—Lady Emily Hope. Poor dear—she suffers the torments of the damned from what they tell her are neuralgic headaches. From what I hear, I believe you could help her."

"I'd like to, if I can."

Something told me that this might be the beginning of a very different connection from the Carpenter-Thesiger one, and it came over me suddenly how bored and tired I was with these play-time women, who used me only as a form of self-indulgence, to enable them to carry on the racket which, in the end, would get them down.

"I'll have to speak to her first, and then—can I ring you anywhere?" he asked.

I was vexed to think I was not yet in Plymouth Street, with a telephone number of my own. Urgent messages were sometimes sent in from next door, but the woman who took them was a silly noodle and often got them wrong.

"I think Mrs. Thesiger's servants would take a message; I'm there on Tuesdays and Fridays, between five and six."

"All right, I'll do that," he promised, as the door of the box opened and the others began to string in.

For some reason or other, Mrs. Thesiger insisted on driving away from the theatre with Mr. Somervell; I don't know why, unless she felt I was getting on too well with one of her *beaux*. Solness packed the brigadier, Archie Culmer, Mrs. Wakeford and myself into his big Rolls, and left the others

to follow in Mr. do Araguayo's car. The brigadier was puffing with relief; he had found Mrs. Anstey heavy going. The night club where we were having supper was somewhere off Grosvenor Street, and we had just swung north out of Piccadilly, when Archie, who was fairly pickled, cried out:

"Come on, let's have a bottle at Flora's before we join the crowd!"

Mrs. Wakeford said—although she was laughing:

"Don't be a fool, Archie! I refuse to hold you up while we are dancing."

"Don't need any holdin' up, ol' girl," Archie protested. "What say, Solness? Tell your chap to go round by Park Lane. Haven't seen Flora for months; jus' in the mood to see Flora."

"Perhaps Mrs. Timson isn't in the mood to see Flora?" Mrs. Wakeford gave me a sly look.

"I don't know who Flora is," I said, "but won't the others be waiting for us?" I wanted to get back to the party and Mr. Somervell again; he was really the only one there was any pleasure in being with.

They all laughed, and seemed to take it as a great joke that I did not know Flora.

"Perhaps Mrs. Timson knows of the Hotel Debrett?" It was the brigadier-general, in a leery kind of voice. He had been stroking my leg for the last ten minutes, and I had been wondering if I could bring my high heel down on the right foot, if I tried, in the tangle on the floor of the Rolls.

I knew the Debrett—by name. Flora, who managed it (it now belonged to a company, of whom I knew Solness was one), had been on town in her youth, but, striking lucky, was set up as manageress of the Debrett, a post she had held for more than half a century.

Archie Culmer was insistent, and, since the other men were obviously willing, Mrs. Wakeford turned to me with a little grimace, and said:

"Well, I suppose we've got to pander to these low males"—and got out under the porch of the Debrett. Our companions, who were evidently very much at home there, went straight across the hall, opened a door marked "Private," and led the way into a room filled with smoke and men and women drinking champagne, and I was introduced to Flora.

Everybody knows Flora—or did, thirty years ago, when she was a classic figure of the West End; when one met her up Bond Street, peering into Asprey's or Finnigan's window, or saw her old-fashioned brougham with the shifty-eyed coachman and the rakish bay waiting outside her tailor's in Savile Row. She must have been a fine girl in her youth; she was still—at the time of which I am speaking—as straight as a grenadier and almost as tall. Her proportions were beautiful—they probably made her look taller than she was: small head on good shoulders, flat back and narrow hips, all well shown off by her severe style in dressing. Her suits, which she wore at every hour of the day or night, were almost mannish in cut, and always finished off with a stock of white or chrome yellow silk. On the top of this smart effect was a frowsy old head of peroxidized hair, knotted anyhow, and a face you remembered for its port wine complexion and a pair of wild china-blue eyes. There was a portrait by Blanche of Flora in her private sitting-room (the one we were now in), that showed her as a girl of twenty-two or -three, with a peaches-and-cream complexion and eyes like an angel. One does not know, of course, how much was fact and how much the effect she had on Blanche.

"Knowing Flora"—I caught an experienced sort of murmur from Mrs. Wakeford—"I should say she's at her third or fourth bottle."

She greeted Solness as "Claude" and the brigadier as "Bill" (neither of which happened to be their names), called Archie something quite unprintable and kissed Mrs. Wakeford. Me she stared at hard, said, "Pleased to meet you, dear," and asked if I knew Lords Thingummy and Flookempush (who stood up and bowed), Mr. Umpleby and dear little Princess Swizzlestick—all of which names, as you may imagine, were generated from Flora's imagination. She never got names right—a trick experience may have taught her to cultivate. Solness was introduced as Lord Strawberry-nose, the brigadier and Archie as something equally improbable, and Mrs. Wakeford—"whom you all know"—as "dear little Tootsy-Wootsy." I was dear little Something Else by the end of the session, which was only concluded by Mrs. Wakeford's dragging the men away and saying she did not mean to miss a free supper. Flora, who had taken a fancy to me,

kissed me at parting, and conquered her fifth bottle sufficiently to say, "If you're ever looking for somewhere to go in the evening, dear, don't forget the old Debrett"—an invitation which I was, somewhat surprisingly, to remember.

The others, of course, wanted to know where we had been, and I fancied Mr. Somervell's eyes flickered just a trifle when we said "The Debrett," but he smiled at me as kindly as ever, and we danced while they were fetching our order. He danced wonderfully. Believe it or not, I had never set foot on a dancing floor since we left Crowle, but I was quick at picking up steps, and it would have been a poor performer who could not dance with Mr. Somervell. He asked me if I liked the Debrett, and I went demure and said it seemed to be very amusing, to which he answered gravely that it was supposed to be one of the most amusing places in town, and that ended the matter, so far as we were concerned.

It must have been about three in the morning when Mrs. Wakeford and I found ourselves alone in the ladies' toilet. I was wondering how I was going to find a taxi at that hour, and rather hoped Mr. Somervell would give me a lift—although I did not much want him to see the shabby little place where I lodged. However, darkness might improve that. My head was splitting and I had resolved never, while I was working, to take a night out like this again. Mrs. Wakeford was doing her mouth up at the glass.

"Lois tells me you're a marvel," she observed.

A marvel and a magician; Mrs. Thesiger was certainly doing her best for me. The impudence of Mrs. Wakeford's next remark took the breath out of me for a moment.

"How does it pay you?" she asked coolly.

I told her, very well. She gave me a cunning look.

"Rubbish. I know what your line is, and you can't put your charges up much higher than they are already. When you feel like making real money, come to me, and I'll put you on a much more profitable line of country. You know, I'm in the business myself," she drawled.

Suddenly it came to me. I knew why Mrs. Wakeford was so well known at Flora's, and I understood some not very delicate jokes the brigadier had made—and I wasn't supposed to overhear—during the course of supper. And I remembered Alice, and her promise to teach me all she knew, if I used it

in her way. I was not prudish, but something in me—something which was still there, although my eagerness to make money had nearly stifled it—took umbrage (that was a favourite expression of Mr. Somervell's) at being put in Mrs. Wakeford's category. I looked her straight in the eye as I answered.

"Thank you. I won't be likely to trouble you, as I don't think we are in the same line of business."

She did not seem to be offended; she only shrugged her shoulders.

"It makes no difference to me. I thought you might like to make some money—that's all."

When I saw Mrs. Thesiger the following week, she asked:

"Did Aimée say anything to you in the cloakroom?"

I admitted she did. Mrs. Thesiger shot a look at me out of the corner of her eye.

"She said she was going to. What did you say?"

"I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

It was some time before Mrs. Thesiger answered.

"I dare say you're right. If Aimée doesn't look out, she'll have the police down on that place of hers in Mount Street."

This was the first of my odd experiences, which came hand in hand, as you see, with one of the best in my life—I mean, meeting Mr. Somervell. I did not know, then, how much he was going to count for, or what a valuable friend he was going to prove. He spoke to his cousin, and in due course I went with him to call on Lady Emily Hope. What a contrast that was to Mrs. Thesiger's!

The house was in Hill Street, and we were shown into a small sitting-room as perfect in its way as a room in a museum; yet it was full of personality, and it had that kind of welcoming atmosphere which is never there in a place merely designed for show. You saw at a glance it was the room of someone with simple and very choice taste, and I knew that, even if I became rich, and could afford a house like Mrs. Carpenter's, I could never create a room like Lady Emily's; I would not have known how to begin. There were none of those great, feather-stuffed divans and chairs like strawberry-pink elephants with dropsy, that crowded the Hertford Street drawing-room; the furniture was almost severe, although comfortable enough, and the lines of Lady Emily's

chairs and cabinets were so lovely, they made you want to stroke them, with each piece set, apparently casually, but in just the place that brought out its finest points. The walls were covered with what Mr. Somervell told me was called *toile de Jouy*; it was the first time I had met it, and I could not help exclaiming at its beauty and freshness, as well as at the attractive background it made for Lady Emily's walnut and dark rosewood. The recesses on either side the chimney-breast were filled with bookshelves, and over the mantelpiece itself, which I recognised as a very fine piece of Adam carving, was a Venetian scene by Canaletto; the blues and greens and the rosy sun effect on the stonework being just what the room wanted to "pick it up" and make it alive. Rooms give people away faster than anything, and I felt I already knew Lady Emily when she came in and said quietly she was sorry to have kept us waiting.

She was rather like Mr. Somervell; you saw the relationship in their nice straight noses, a little long for their faces, which gave them their gentle, well-bred air. But Lady Emily looked the elder of the two, although I believe this was a false impression; her hair was quite white over the temples, and her transparent, greyish skin was very faintly wrinkled round the eyes. She looked a very delicate woman.

She spoke to me without any of the affected familiarity of Mrs. Carpenter's set: pleasantly, but formally. I thought, there's no doubt *you* are a lady. I noticed she was wearing V.A.D. uniform. Mr. Somervell said:

"If you can persuade my cousin to give up some of her hospital work, you'll be doing as much good as I hope you will do with your massage."

"Now, Dick! You know that's a forbidden subject." She was smiling, but the hint was not lost on me. Lady Emily was not the kind who encouraged personal discussions in front of strangers. "Shall we go straight to my room, Mrs. Timson? I am sure your time is as valuable as my own."

Her bedroom was as simple as a nursery, and I had, for once, no complaint to make of the bed, which was almost as high and narrow as the one in Alice's clinic, with a hard, flat mattress. It had a little tester and curtains of spotted muslin, which Lady Emily ordered to be tied back out of my way.

Her maid was not a French fly-by-night, like Mrs. Thesiger's, but a very respectable, elderly woman, who had caught something of her mistress's manner of reserve and formality.

I worked on Lady Emily until her face, which was drawn with the "neuralgic" pain she said she suffered almost constantly, relaxed, and she passed off to sleep. Even the old maid was pleased; she told me, "It's the first time her ladyship has slept for a month, without taking her pills." I resolved to find out what the "pills" were, and see if we could not dispense with them permanently. I was very tired, for I had put all I had into my work that afternoon; there is a good deal of hypnotism in massage, you know, and I may say I had *willed* the pain out of Lady Emily, almost as much as I had worked it out with my hands. But I felt happy; I felt as if the afternoon's work had given me back my self-respect, which sometimes seemed to get mislaid, when I was pandering to the self-indulgence of women like Mrs. Carpenter; I knew I had done a real job, of which Alice—and even Dr. Remington—would approve.

I had been treating Lady Emily for about a fortnight, generally managing to fit in my visits with her hours at the hospital: which meant that some days I went in the morning and some in the afternoon. On this particular night, her maid having sent a message that "her ladyship was really very poorly," I went in about a quarter to nine, and it was well after ten before I got her to sleep.

Of course it had to be one of the raid nights, and directly the maroons went they chased us down the Tubes, as usual. We sat or lay or walked about the platforms and passages, hearing faintly the bombs bursting on the East End. It seemed as if the All Clear would never go, and, when they let us out at last, the rain was pelting down and I had missed the last train from Victoria. Not a taxi to be seen, and all the hotels full; the policeman I spoke to said there was not a hope at the Regent Palace or the Piccadilly. What about the Strand?

"Strand Palace? Full up, ma'am; likewise the Savoy and the Cecil. You might get into the Ritz."

I thanked him for nothing. The nearest I would get to the Ritz would be under the arcades, for I had no intention of paying Ritz prices. The rain was coming down in sheets and

the battery of my torch was giving out. I suddenly thought of the Debrett. Why not? Flora might remember me and let me sleep on a couch, if she had not a bedroom to offer me.

Well, I plunged up through Shepherd Market, and got myself lost somewhere between North Audley Street and Park Lane, which was not very familiar ground to me; but at last I seemed to be on the right track and recognised the porch where we had been put down on the night of Mrs. Thesiger's party.

I found the door open, as I expected, but the night porter did not seem anxious to let me in. In my dripping clothes I don't suppose I measured up to the standard of the Debrett customers. I heard a lot of talking and laughing going on in the private room, but when I asked if I could speak to Flora, I was told she was not available. I guessed the man was acting on instructions, but I slipped half a crown into his hand (I knew later that half a crown did not count for much at the Debrett!) and asked him to tell Flora it was the lady who came in a few weeks ago with Lord Solness's party. I suppose the name worked it. He looked doubtful, but he took the message. Presently he came back and asked me to sign the register, and I was shown upstairs by an elderly, bad-tempered chambermaid, who was not at all pleased at being given my wet clothes to dry, and told I should want them at seven o'clock in the morning. Evidently early rising was not among the virtues of the Debrett visitors.

Actually, I woke myself (I was in the habit of waking soon after six) and had to ring twice before I got my early tea. While I was sitting up, drinking it, the door opened and Flora walked in without knocking and sat down on the end of my bed. I heard later that that was the way she ran the Debrett—more on the lines of a private house than a hotel; she liked toddling in on her guests for a gossip, and if you did not want Flora your only hope was to turn the key—when you would probably be bawled out by her, hammering and wanting to come in!

She sat there, blinking and looking as if she had not been to bed since the last time I saw her—which, as it turned out, was very nearly the truth.

"Oh, it's you. I remember you. Came in with Claude Solness's crowd about three weeks ago, didn't you?" This

was a great triumph of memory for Flora. "Sorry I didn't see you last night, dear. Came in about midnight, wasn't it? To tell the truth, I'm generally a bit tiddly round about midnight. It clears up later, and I'm as sound as a bell."

I thought the poor old bell looked a bit cracked, myself—but I said something sympathetic.

"Had a good night, dear?"

"Very, thanks. I hope you did too."

"Did what?" said Flora vaguely.

"What you said—had a good night."

"Me? I haven't been to bed yet, if that's what you mean. I've just seen old Tommy Tiddypush off to his room; we've been down in the parlour, talking about old times."

"Well, that's one way of getting through the nights."

"I hate the nights," said Flora. "Bloody waste of time, I call 'em, when you get to my age. Different thing when I was yours!" She gave that disgraceful chuckle of hers, which somehow was not offensive, because it was so honest. "What's your business, dear?"

"How do you know I've got one?" I guessed that not many business women—in my sense of the word, not Flora's!—patronised the Debrett.

Her old eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"You can't take me in, dear. What is it? The rag trade? I've got one or two smart girls that come in here—friends of the customers—that have pulled themselves properly into the top class, since the war. You ought to meet them; they'll let me have anything I want at cost price."

"Bless your heart, I haven't time to think about clothes—I've hardly got time to wear them!"

"M'm. Never neglect your appearance; those words ought to be written on every woman's heart," said Flora, whose stock was round under her left ear, and a lock of her yellow hair, with a big black hairpin stuck through it, was coiling down on the shoulder of her shepherd's plaid. "Well, there's business and business. We get Lady This and the Duchess of That—and it's a damned shame, I say, to the honest girls down the street. Still, human nature's what it is, and the title makes no difference to the way you are. They're not all that way, either. There's poor little Toni Blandish, came in for a night with her husband, before he went back from his leave. Dying to

have a baby—both of 'em. I often tell 'em, zeal defeats its own object. What did you say your business was, dear? Throw us one of your pillows. I get such an ache in my spine I could shove my head in the gas oven, if the whole place hadn't gone 'lectric."

"You'd better have me to look after you." I was only half joking. I liked old Flora, and I respected her, as I respect any woman who has had a hard fight and made good in the end. "My job's massage, and I'm supposed to be very good at it. I'll give you a rub now, if you like."

"Who? Me?" She gave her outrageous wink. "I can put you on to one or two of that sort, if you want 'em, but not me. No! Old as I am, I don't hold with anything that doesn't come in the way of nature, and when I want it, dear, I know where to go for it."

She sat there, wagging her head and chuckling, and looking so disgraceful I couldn't help laughing.

"I'll tell you what, though. I tell you who's staying here now: Lord . . ." She got the name right that time, so, for obvious reasons, I cannot use it here. "Would you like me to send up to him? He's good for a pony any time."

"Listen, Flora." I leaned over and gave her a pat on the knee. "You've got it wrong. I don't take male cases, and my massage is the real thing; I don't go in for providing fun for dirty old men."

Flora's bright china-blue eyes went foggy, as if she was trying to take this in.

"Why don't you, dear?" A child could not have spoken more innocently. "There's a pot of money in it."

I knew I had no argument that would hold water with Flora, so I left it at that.

"Well, now I've got to get up. Any time you get over your objection to massage, I'll be very pleased to come and treat you—as a friend. Perhaps I could help that spine of yours, after all."

"That's all right, dear," said Flora amiably. She had not a notion what I was talking about. Presently she wandered across the room and rang the bell. I lit a cigarette and offered her one, which she refused. "Never touch the muck, dear. A good cigar, now and again; I'm partial to a Henry Clay. But I never smoke in the morning."

The door opened—again without a knock—and the waiter came in, and there was I in my vest, which was all I had to sleep in; but this was evidently a commonplace at the Debrett, for neither Flora nor the man batted an eyelash. He was a surly old crock—like the rest of the Debrett staff; nobody but Flora would have kept him for ten minutes. He stood glowering at her.

"Well, what's it now?"

"A bottle of Pol Roger, you lazy old sod."

"'Oo's it to go down to?" He evidently did not think—and quite rightly—that I was the kind to order champagne before breakfast.

"What the hell's that got to do with you? Put it down to Lord . . .!" Flora yelled after him. He let out a kind of a growl as he slammed the door. She blinked round at me.

"It's his bunions, poor old bastard. Only one lift, and the staff's not supposed to use that. I swear at 'em when I catch 'em, but they know I don't mean it. It's the hell—if you've got bunions."

I got on my clothes as fast as I could, and was decent by the time the man came back with the bottle. It is the first and only time I drank champagne before breakfast—which I had been told was not served before half-past eight; too late for me as I had to get home and change. Flora came down to the hall with me and headed me off the desk, where I was going to ask for my bill.

"Don't be silly, dear. You're a friend of Solness's, aren't you?"

"If all Lord Solness's friends come here on the nod, I'm surprised you make it pay!"

She nudged me and winked.

"Don't you make a mistake. It'll be all charged up to somebody. The people who come here don't ask for details—they wouldn't come again if they did!" She snorted. "Good-bye, dear. Give my love to your boy friends. And remember—if you ever feel like making a bit on the side, we can fix you up here. I believe," said Flora, as she took her walking stick from the smutty-faced page boy and accompanied me down the steps, "in giving people what they want. That's the way to keep the dividends up, dear; bear that in mind."

It was a wonderful morning, after the pelting night; the

sky was real duck-egg blue, and all fluffed with little bits of pink cloud that reminded me of a bed-jacket I had seen in one of the Bond Street shops, and meant to get for Kathleen. I watched Flora go rocking across Park Lane and through the Stanley Gate and while I stood, hoping for a taxi, I saw her plunge off across the grass which must have been sodden with the night's rain. So that was how she kept it up: the soaking every night, and all the funny business at the Debreit, and the brawls with the staff—she washed them off every morning in the rain or the dew, stumbling along under the cool, empty and innocent sky (I was startled to find myself remembering Mr. Somervell's word, that he had applied to me), under the green trees that shed their early-morning kindness upon the raudled old woman wandering under their branches in search of something of which she had forgotten the name.

Perhaps I was more "innocent" than I supposed. People like Mrs. Wakeford and old Flora made me feel that way. Especially Mrs. Wakeford, who prided herself on her viciousness, and, I felt sure, would take pleasure in debauching any simple thing that came her way. While Flora simply went on the straightforward principle that human beings belong to themselves, and it was only a matter of business to meet the demand with supply. Indifferent and—I think the word is amoral, there was as much distance between her amorality and the immorality of Mrs. Wakeford as there is between life and death.

It was certainly tempting, to make money in Flora's buccaneering fashion, or in the quantity suggested by the diamond on the bosom of Mrs. Wakeford's prune-coloured gown; but I had fully realised that, apart from the personal risk one ran—one couldn't be the mother of two girls and go in for the game like that. If our future depended on my slipping into the Debreit, or joining Aimée's flash establishment in Mount Street—then it looked as if we would have to stop in Plymouth Street for good. I felt discouraged, for already, before I got into it, I was looking on Plymouth Street only as a stepping stone to something better for the girls and me.

If I could only think up some racket of my own, that would be as profitable as the ones which, I knew, were being worked every day of the year all over London—we too could

be in the "real money." I had no sort of objection to breaking the law, for I thought—and still think—that many of the English laws are out of date, bear no relation to conditions of modern living, and are responsible—some of them—for a great deal of unhappiness that ought to be avoided. But I knew I could not afford to get caught, and I had no intention of embarking on some silly little course of law-breaking; for it is always the small-timers who pay the price, while the big operators get away, as the saying is, with murder.

CHAPTER NINE

I MOVED into Plymouth Street in the late autumn of 1917, and I had so little time to myself that it took me months to get straight. The only time I had was in the evenings, after my work was done, and I was at it, often, into the small hours, dragging furniture from room to room, settling where this and that was to go, then changing my mind and putting it all somewhere else. But at last I got it, as I thought, presentable.

When I lay in my new bed at night (I had taken the smaller of the two bedrooms on the first floor, leaving the large one for the girls), I used to count over the things I had gathered around me, and sometimes I would even get up and go into another room, switching on the light to look at a mirror or a cabinet that had just come from the shop. I often wondered whether people who had their houses packed with precious objects, like Lady Emily, got as much pleasure out of their treasures as I got from my few bits and pieces, and I always visualised the house as it would be by the time I had finished with it, and it had acquired that warm, personal feeling of a lived-in place. All the time before I went to sleep I would spend hugging myself in rapture, thinking how all of it was my very own, and once, when I was very tired, it flashed into my mind how *angry* I would be if I had to die and leave all these things for which I had struggled so hard, to be scattered and sold to people who would only look on them as "second-hand furniture"! When a thing becomes your own, through your own effort and sacrifice, it ceases to be "furniture"; it is part of yourself. Don't be a fool, Rose Timson, I had to

remind myself. You won't have *time* to die, my girl, for the next thirty years!

I was hurrying along Curzon Street one afternoon when I met Mr. Somervell. I had not seen him since the day at Lady Emily's, and I wondered if he would recognise me; but I smiled, and he whipped off his hat at once and crossed the street to join me.

"How are you? I've been wondering what had happened to you."

For a moment I had almost that wild, gay feeling that came over me on the morning I got my divorce.

"I don't look the sort of woman things 'happen' to, do I?"

"You look very blooming," he told me.

"It's my profession, to look blooming!"

"You're certainly as good as a tonic. In fact"—he pretended to examine me closely—"I believe you're on the spree. What is it this time? Cocktails?—or a party?"

"If you want to know—I'm rushing between two appointments, and I'm nearly ten minutes late."

"You're not going to my cousin, by any chance?"

"I'm never late for Lady Emily."

"How odd that you should say that. She has the same effect on me. Emily is a splendid person. Well, we both seem to be going the same way; may I walk with you?"

"Certainly—if you don't mind walking fast."

"If I walked fast, you'd have to run," he told me gravely: a challenge I accepted, and found he was right. For, quick as I was on my feet, his long legs carried him over the ground as if he was in seven-league boots, and presently I suffered the indignity of having to break into a trot, and then I was panting and laughing and begging him to slow down: by which time we were at the bottom of Hay Hill.

From then on, our conversation was as easy as it had been on the night at the theatre, and I found myself telling him all about the house in Plymouth Street, and my excitement in making the first real home for the girls they had ever known since they were born. Goodness knows why I expected him to be interested—men do not care about houses, and I had not even mentioned it to Mrs. Carpenter or any of her friends, except to give them the new address and telephone number. It seemed wonderful to have someone to talk to like this; I

had not realised how lonely and isolated a life—apart from my work—I was living, or that I had had to bottle it all up, until here it was, bursting out of me like a fountain!

You may think it odd that I had not discussed it with all these women I was supposed to be on “friendly” terms with, but you must remember that most of them paid me as much for listening as for my professional services, and I soon found that all they wanted was to talk about their own affairs, not to hear about mine.

“I think it sounds grand,” said Mr. Somervell, in one of the rare opportunities I gave him of opening his mouth; and he spoke as if he meant it. “I hope you’ll show it to me one day.”

“Why don’t you come to tea on Sunday?” The words were out before I had time to think. I believe I blushed, although blushing was never in my line; but I did not want him to think I was presuming on the one occasion we had met as equals, at Mrs. Thesiger’s party.

“Do you mean it?” He actually sounded delighted.

“Naturally I mean it. But”—I began to flounder—“it is quite a long way from the West End, and it’s not at all the sort of place you are used to!”

“How do you know what I’m used to? No, Mrs. Timson: I’m not going to let you shuffle out of your invitation! Next Sunday—at what time?”

When I got home, I sat by the “drawing-room” fire, lit a cigarette and tried to see the room through Mr. Somervell’s eyes. At least there was nothing vulgar—except a pair of cushions Mrs. Carpenter had given me: one round and one heart-shaped, of emerald green ruched silk with gold fringe. I would have got rid of them, but for their being really good quality cushions with down filling. I made a mental note I would have plain square ones as soon as I could afford, covered in stuff to go with the couch.

I had bought a plain carpet, printed linen curtains of a William-and-Mary design, and a big chesterfield with two arm-chairs to match covered with a darkish mushroom-coloured woven material. Not much else, except an oval walnut table, with leaves that folded down, and a little pie-crust one, for glasses. Perhaps Mr. Somervell would not notice the cushions if I drew the curtains a little, and used the floor

standard instead of the top lights. I wished I had not had to put in a gas fire but, while I was "doing" for myself, it was the only practical thing.

By the time I went to bed, I had swung from one extreme to another and back again: first feeling satisfied with the place, which was unpretentious and simple, and then thinking how cheap and crude it must appear to a man like Mr. Somervell, moving in circles where good taste was unhampered by lack of money. I felt I had been mad to invite him, then glad and excited as a girl at the thought of his coming. George was to have been my "first foot," and it seemed as if some instinct had lain behind my reluctance to send him the invitation for which he was waiting. Hetty had given me a broad enough hint when she came up, the night before, with a parcel George had sent me from the shop. Standing at the door and looking round, she said:

"You'll soon have it ready for Mr. Glaize, won't you?"

I felt quite angry, as if, for the first time, Hetty had stepped out of her place, and I said shortly that he would hear from me, all in good time; which made Hetty flush up and hurry away. I should not have spoken like that, for of course she was thinking of old George, waiting patiently, and not letting any one see he was hurt because, for the first time for years, I had done something without consulting him or asking his help. I could have made him as happy as a sandboy if I had sent for him to knock in a few nails, or help straighten out the linoleum, but I could not bring myself to do it. It would have been to give him a share in the house which I did not want any one to have. At least, not George.

So on Sunday afternoon there was I, with the new tea service I had rushed to buy on Saturday before the shops closed, and a Buzzard's cake, and some hot scones, and buttered toast with Gentleman's Relish—a last-minute inspiration. I wished the teapot was silver, instead of brown pottery, and that I had a handsome tray of Sheffield plate, with a pierced gallery, like mother had at Crowle; but I consoled myself with the thought that these would come later, and that my table, if not elegant, at least looked cosy and welcoming.

"I've brought you a house-warming present," he said, almost before he was across the doorstep. "Soapstone is supposed to be very lucky; they say it keeps poverty away from the door."

It was a little, greenish figure of a Chinese girl, bent over a lotus she carried in her arms: a pretty, tender thing it was—I had never seen anything like it before. It reminded me, in a way, of Kathleen. I put it on the mantelpiece, feeling glad I had not spent any money yet on ornaments, for when I saw it standing there by itself, I remembered the things I had learned from Lady Emily's, and I knew it was right it should be by itself.

We chatted about unimportant things over tea, and it was time to draw the curtains when Mr. Somervell rose.

"Am I keeping you?"

"Me? I don't go anywhere on Sundays."

"You work very hard, don't you?"

"Yes. One has to, when one has one's living to earn."

"How long ago did you divorce your husband?" I liked the way he took it for granted I did the divorcing—although he might, of course, have got it from Mrs. Thesiger. But, from the little I knew of Mr. Somervell, he was not the kind to pry into people's affairs behind their backs.

"Getting on for three years," I told him, wondering, as I did so, if he were married. He must have read the question in my face, for he answered, quite coolly:

"Yes, I'm married." Which surprised me, because the way he spoke told me there was a story behind it, and I thought I knew most of the gossip in Mrs. Thesiger's set. "Have you ever thought about marrying again?"

"No," I said firmly. "I've got the girls, and that's a full-time job for me. Besides, I have my own ideas about bringing them up, and I shouldn't like any interference."

"I'm sure you wouldn't." This seemed to amuse him. "I'd be rather sorry for anybody who tried to interfere with you."

"I suppose I strike you as a hard case?" I was not sure whether to be pleased or a little put out.

I knew that with most people it paid to give an impression of toughness; both men and women, I had discovered, are only too ready to slip a quick one across a woman who has not got a man at the back of her. But I had not wanted to give this impression to Mr. Somervell. Shall I confess that, all the time we were sitting together, chatting on this and that, I had been pretending to myself that I was one of the soft, protected women of his own class: women who give men tea

in their drawing-rooms and go up afterwards to change, with the help of their maids: women like Lady Emily and her friends, who talk a gentle, rather puzzling language of their own, full of references to the people they know, but not scandalous—not telling smoking-room stories, or putting in bits of slang picked up from the Flying Corps boys. I sounds as if I had been on my best behaviour, but all I had done, actually, was to relax: the thing I was always telling my patients to do, and not having time for myself. Mr. Somervell was so simple and sincere that he made other people be the same; I never saw anybody "put on an act" with him, although his gift for getting the best out of them sometimes made them seem better than they were in their ordinary dealings—which, of course, supported his rather easy-going contention that most people are "good sorts," if you take the trouble to know them. Not that I ever knew him to take trouble; his method was simply to lie back and take people in, like you take in light, through his pores; and he expected them to be easy and effortless in the same way.

To talk about work and life, after our quiet conversation about the English country—he knew my part of the world quite well—and the changes that were coming over it with the improvement in transport: and how post-war innovations would affect the life of the countryside, broke up my pretence, and I heard the rather hard, short note come into my voice—the note that belonged to my business.

"I suppose I'm the kind of woman who can look after herself, and doesn't like people who get in her way."

Mr. Somervell looked at me for some time before answering.

"I don't think you've got yourself quite right, Rose." It was only afterwards that I realised he had called me by my Christian name. "The hard case is the person who has no doubts and no regrets; I believe you have both, sometimes. But you have set yourself a certain task, and neither man nor the devil is going to prevent your carrying it out."

"What about God?" I said it flippantly, not caring if he were shocked; for something inside me was hurting, and I did not know what it was.

"I wouldn't presume to answer for God; we aren't on those terms." His eyes twinkled, although he spoke seriously. "As

for your self-sufficiency—I suppose we all have it, up to a point. In your case, when the point is reached, I should think you are far too sensible a woman to snub your friends, if they mean well by you."

I thought of George.

"To tell you the truth"—I spoke impulsively—"I haven't got many friends."

"Ambitious people seldom have. It's the chief mistake they make, as a rule." He made a joke of it, yet, for some reason, I had to explain, to justify myself.

"You don't know it all, you see. After I got married, I didn't meet many people—my kind of people. And the friends I had made before—well, they didn't care much for my husband. That always makes it awkward, doesn't it?"

"What kind of a man was your husband, Rose?" He had sat down again, and it made me happy, now, to see him settling back in his chair, as if he meant to stay.

"Harry? Why—I don't know." To my amazement, I found I didn't. I had not liked him, and that meant I had tried not to notice him more than I could help. I felt, however, that I ought to be able to find some sort of an answer to Mr. Somervell's question. "Well, I suppose you would call him quite a nice sort of a fellow. He was very well educated—a great reader!" I was glad to remember something about him that might appeal to Mr. Somervell.

Mr. Somervell smiled again, as if I amused him.

"All right, Rose; we'll leave it at that for the present. Go on about your friends."

"Well, I'm a sociable sort of person, really, but sociability costs money; I didn't have that, for a long while. And now things are—well, a little easier, I haven't got time. It will be better, now I have got the house straight, and can have a few people in, now and again!"

As I said it, I wondered who I would have in. I certainly did not want Stanley, Alfred, Ozzy and their wives, although I knew I must face up to a family tea party sooner or later. Alice was still in Yorkshire, I would have to have Hetty once or twice, and George—poor old George! He was on my back like the Old Man of the Sea. I felt that to have George there, regularly, even if it were only once a week, would be to set up a permanent link with a part of my life I wanted to forget.

I would gladly have taken him to Gatti's or the Trocadero, bought seats for a show, given him a rattling good evening: but I knew this would not be what he wanted. To sit with me over the fire, smoking his pipe, admiring everything, and perhaps being allowed to fix a washer or ease a drawer—that was George's idea of the blissful resumption of our old habit of friendship: which gave me the creeps when I thought how dull and good it was.

"Well, I hope you'll have me again," Mr. Somervell was saying.

"Please!—whenever you can come. I do want you to know the girls; I hope you will like them."

"I'm very much disposed to like little girls. What will you do in the holidays? Give up your work?"

"That's just what's worrying me. I can't give it up—and they have a whole month at Christmas. I've got to find someone who will look after the house and them while I'm out."

"I might be able to help you. What time are you in, if I give you a ring?"

"I'm always in by seven, unless Lady Emily sends for me. Do you mean you know somebody?"

"I might, but it's no use saying anything at present. And I must go now, because I have to meet someone at the club."

"If you really find me someone to look after Kathleen and Jo, I'll bless you for the rest of my life," I told him, as we shook hands on the doorstep.

"I hope to earn the blessing! I'm glad I've seen your home; it gives one a feeling of being friends."

After he went, the house looked different. It wasn't anything he said; I believe his only comment—on the curtains—was that they were "very nice"; I had certainly spent a great deal on the material. I knew that, in his kind of houses, furniture was covered with satin, not crash, and the windows would be draped with heavy velvet, and lamps shaded with painted silk or brocade. Yet his very way of accepting my cheap little parlour had made me satisfied with it. He had lolled in one of the armchairs as if he was at home there; the green cushion, crumpled by his body, had lost its vulgarity. I was silly enough to want to leave it like that—not to shake it out and plump it up and dismiss Mr. Somervell from my room. The butt of his cigar lay in the ash tray, and its scent

lingered in the curtains. Oh—after all, I was only thirty-nine, and it is natural for a woman of that age to have a man about her,

I felt that, in some way, Mr. Somervell was to be my sheet anchor through the difficult time ahead. I could not expect him to see much of us—even if he happened to take a fancy to Jo, as I imagined he would; everybody liked that child, probably because she was such a lively, funny, little cuss! (She had got over her crying fits, thank goodness.) But I thought he might advise me about the things they ought to do in their holidays: the museums and art galleries they should see, which I knew nothing about and cared less, but I had learned from the girls' chatter and from casual remarks dropped by Miss Cleveland the kind of things the children at The Lodge and at The Towers (the school I had found, with Miss Cleveland's help, for Kathleen) went to and saw with their parents.

It was several nights before the telephone bell rang, just as I was finishing my supper, and, as I expected, it was Mr. Somervell.

"You're not in bed yet?"

"Good gracious, it's only half-past nine!"

"I wondered if I might come along for ten minutes. I think I've found what you wanted, but I'd like to have a few words with you before settling things up."

While I rushed into a better dress and did my hair, I was thinking how pleasant it was to have the privacy of one's own home. "The street," of course, had talked its head off about George; they had me properly taped as a town woman. In my lodgings, I would have been out on the pavement with my bag if I had taken a man to my room. Here, for the first time, I was receiving a gentleman visitor at an hour Nora would certainly have considered damning, and, by good luck, I even had a drink to offer him. Mrs. Carpenter, who was as generous as ever, although we had almost ceased to pretend my visits were professional, apart from the fee, had given me a bottle of Haig only that day, and I always had soda in the house. I was just deciding that I would keep a few good cigars as well, when the bell rang, and I ran down to open the door for Mr. Somervell.

I never dreamed a man could look, or be, so tired. His face

was as white as paper. When he smiled it was only a matter of showing his teeth, and he let himself down into the arm-chair, as if his own weight was too much for him to carry any longer. I said nothing, but mixed him a stiff drink, which I put in his hand.

"I mustn't stay more than a few minutes, but—her name's Susan Clayborne," he told me presently.

"It's all right as a name." I smiled at him.

"She's all right as a person. I swear that's the truth, although she hasn't got a 'character' to show you."

I admit that, for a moment, I looked at Mr. Somervell rather old-fashioned. Was he wishing some past fancy of his off on me?

"She hasn't got a character, because the only person who could give her one is in an asylum. She was with my wife for six years." His tone asked for no pity, and I gave him none.

I said, after a pause:

"She's quite young, then?"

"Like you—in her thirties, I suppose. I had better tell you the whole thing. It may bore you, but I think it will interest you in Susan."

"Just a moment." I switched off the top light and put on the standard, twitching the shade down, so that the light was not in his eyes. Then I filled his glass again, and sat down quietly, on the opposite side of the hearth. I felt the room intimate and homely again—as he had made it on his last visit, and my instinct told me that he was about to take me into his confidence: a thing which pleases any woman, if she likes the man.

"My wife, Cynthia," said Mr. Somervell, "was one of the loveliest creatures you ever saw. When I met her she was only seventeen, and we were married soon after her eighteenth birthday. She was one of the Bredons: you know the family."

I knew of them—connections of Mrs. Thesiger's: "the batty Bredons," I had heard her call them.

"Cynthia inherited most of their oddity; even as a young girl she was considered very eccentric, but I saw in her eccentricities only the protest of a violent and original nature against conventional environment. It isn't unusual, in any case, to have very strong likes and dislikes, although it was, perhaps, a little odd to give such marked expression to them

as Cynthia did. It only amused me and roused my admiration for her courage. She was absolutely indifferent to public opinion; she would fly into violent passions, and accuse people of impossible things; but from the hour we were engaged, she was never anything but adorable to me—for a great many years."

I found myself holding my breath, for, although I could not bear reading, I was as fond as a child of "a story," and I could already see Lady Cynthia, and the wild waywardness with which she had captivated Mr. Somervell.

"One of the troubles we had after our marriage was in the matter of Cynthia's maids. One after another they left, complaining of the way she treated them; and there was always the same scene, of Cynthia weeping and saying, 'But how can I help it, when I *hate* them so?'

"We were staying with my people, down in the country, when she took one of her violent fancies to the daughter of a local baker, and nothing would do but Susan must become her maid. Every one tried to dissuade her—partly because it was very doubtful whether the baker would allow his daughter to become a servant, and also because it was ridiculous that any one so fashionable and fastidious as Cynthia should have for her maid a girl who had no training whatever. We all felt sure there would only be another devastating scene, and bad feeling in the village.

"But we had reckoned without Susan. The girl had great character, and a will of her own. When at last, through Cynthia's pleading, I went, very unwillingly, to see the father, I met, as I had expected, a rebuff. They had not educated the girl to make her into a lady's maid. I returned, to report my failure, and there was the inevitable outburst: in the middle of which the door opened, and a servant came in to say that Miss Clayborne was here, if Lady Cynthia would care to see her.

"I left the pair of them together, and when I came back, Cynthia was radiant, and everything was settled.

"I don't pretend to know how Susan learned her business. Cynthia was not patient; but I seldom heard a complaint, and, as time went on, we began to notice that in Cynthia's moods of violence, which became more and more frequent, the one person who could deal with her was Susan. She had a quiet

sort of self-respecting firmness—well, you will see for yourself.

"The rest of the story hardly concerns you, Rose, but we may as well get it over."

He took his cigar-case out of his pocket and began to light a cigar in the careful fashion which was characteristic of him. After piercing the end, he struck a match, and used it to stroke the cigar which he held in his left hand, rolling it gently in his fingers until all the outer leaves were darkened for about two inches above the tip. He then held the match to the end until it was smouldering, when he placed it between his lips—not to draw, but to puff once, deeply, through. Then he threw the match away, and began to smoke in the usual fashion. It was a ritual which quite fascinated me, and which I never forgot.

"You don't go in for this vice?" He was joking.

I shook my head, thinking of Flora and her Henry Clays.

"Not yet; it's an extravagance I'm saving for—later."

He instantly offered me his case, which I waved away.

"Go on with your story."

"There's not much more. Cynthia left me about three years later. I didn't divorce her because, to be candid, I didn't want to give up my right to look after her. I was afraid of . . . what actually happened. I had a cable from Nassau, to say she had gone out of her mind, and went out to fetch her home. Susan and I managed it together—Susan, who, of course, had gone with her. We looked after her as long as we could, until it became—impossible."

"And what happened to Susan?"

"Oh, Susan went back to the village, where she has been, I'm afraid, very unhappy. They had heard something about Cynthia—certainly not from Susan; one never knows how these things get round—and Susan was made to pay for her loyalty. She was supposed to have 'touched pitch' and therefore been contaminated; you know what villagers are." Mr. Somervell laughed shortly. "Of course she could have saved her credit by blackening Cynthia; but Susan is the sort who would go to the stake first. It just happened to strike me that she was the kind of person you were looking for," he ended.

"Yes; but am I the kind of person Susan is looking for? If she is used to grand houses, and a staff of servants, she isn't

likely to settle down as a working housekeeper in a little place like this."

"Yes, she is. I told you she has some education, and she is very independent. She will like the kind of responsibility you give her, and she will be very good for Kathleen and Jo; she is the eldest of a large family, fond of children, and, I should think, a disciplinarian when it's necessary. She showed her steadiness and common sense with Cynthia, and I think you and she would get on together, and respect each other's points of view."

"Well," I said, a little doubtfully, "she might at least come for the Christmas holidays, and see how she likes it."

I could hardly find words to thank Mr. Somervell. I felt instinctively that he had found the solution of my worst problem. I wished too that I could find some way of expressing my sympathy for his tragedy, but I was always poor at putting my feelings into words, especially when I am touched, as his story had touched me. I managed to ask how Lady Cynthia was now.

"We see very little of each other. I sometimes think it would be wiser if I stopped going. It disturbs her and does neither of us any good. One should remember only—beauty."

A thought came into my mind and I picked up a flat parcel which was lying on the table.

"Would you like to see these? They're photographs of the girls. I had them done last holidays, but they only came to-day." I took them out of the envelope. "They've been a long time, haven't they? But they're all busy doing war photographs."

Mr. Somervell took them in his hand, and I went over and altered the shade of the lamp, so that he could see better.

"What a perfectly exquisite child."

"Jo? She's a bonnie little thing, but I don't know that I'd call her exquisite." I was pleased all the same.

"Is that Jo?" He turned the photograph round towards me, and I must say I was surprised to see it was Kathleen.

"Why, no, that's the elder one. Do you think she's pretty?"

"Not a bit." He smiled, as he always did when he knew he was puzzling me. "Take care, Rose! You've got a *femme fatale* here, if you don't look out."

"It's the way the photograph's taken." I had another look,

and was relieved to find he was joking. "I don't care for the pose much; it's a bit affected, isn't it? But the photographer would have it that way. Here's a full-length, and one of both of them sitting down; that the best likeness, really."

But Mr. Somervell was still looking at the head of Kathleen which I did not like. I had had them both taken in their dancing frocks—white tarlatan skirts and satin bodices with puffed sleeves: quite sweet and fairylike. But the child was turned with her back to the camera, and the satin was pushed down off her shoulders, so that she looked nude. The man had made her look sideways, so they only got her profile, and as Kathleen's eyes were her best point, it was quite a pity. Instead of looking up brightly, she had her eyelids down and some trick of the lights threw a great shadow on them, so that she looked as if she'd got a black eye! Her mouth was too big, and her neck looked like a matchstick, with all her hair pulled round on the far side of her face and hanging down like a piece of curtain. Her hair, as a matter of fact, came out better than the rest; it was rather straight, except for the big wave at the end, but it really did look like spun silk, well-brushed, with lots of light in it.

Mr. Somervell said: "Well, I've always wondered what *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* looked like; and now I know."

I did not take it in at the time, but, just as it happened, Kathleen was chosen to recite that very poem at the school speech day, and I must say that that description about "her hair was long, her step was light and her eyes were wild" was a bit too near my Katie for me to appreciate it.

Then Mr. Somervell was laughing at Jo's comical little mug, and he made a date there and then to take the pair of them to *Where the Rainbow Ends*. He left soon afterwards, but he picked up Kathleen's photograph again before he left and looked at it as if he was trying to learn it by heart. I don't know why, but it did not quite please me; the child was not as good-looking as all that.

Susan Clayborne came up to see me the following week-end, and I saw at a glance that Mr. Somervell's judgment was right. She must have been about my age, but she looked both older and younger, if you know what I mean: older because she did not trouble to set herself off to advantage, which was odd in one who had been maid to a fashionable lady, and

younger because there was a sort of childlike thing about her which, in the circumstances, was equally odd. After all, she had accompanied her mistress when Lady Cynthia ran away with her lover. But this, as I was to discover, was in her character. Her duty was to Lady Cynthia, who was dependent on her, and it was no part of her business to question morals. She was rather like an old-fashioned Dutch doll, bosomy, with a round, red face, and wide-open, dark eyes. Her voice was very nice and she pronounced her words like a lady—which was important for the girls.

She liked cooking and looking after children. When I showed her the kitchen, she made no fuss about its being in the basement, but remarked it was nice and convenient. She had not used a gas stove, but could learn. She liked the room which was to be her bedroom—one of the two attics which I had not yet furnished—and said she had a few things of her own which she would like to put into it, if I agreed: which I did readily, as it not only saved me money, but suggested that Susan was preparing to settle down. We fixed the matter of wages, and I just got her out of the house before George arrived—which I felt was as well: as it appeared that Susan regarded me as quite the lady (an opinion she modified later, but made no difference, except to call me Mrs. Timson, instead of madam, which was all the same to me), and dear old George in his bowler and chrysanthemum did not quite fit into the picture of the household she had gathered up to the moment.

I welcomed George warmly, and we had a good, old-fashioned talk, while I showed him over the house, which he examined from basement to attic, not missing a tin tack. It was really like the old times, only better. Oddly enough, now I had Mr. Somervell for a friend, I found it much easier to be myself with George. It must have been the awful, nervy feeling of being dependent on George for my only masculine company that got me down and made me irritable each time he came near me. I gave him a real, sit-down tea, with kippers and marmalade (none of the elegant scones I made for Mr. Somervell), sally lunn, bunloaf and a madeira cake; just George's style. And I fell back naturally into my old rollicking habits and cracked silly jokes and made a regular orgy of it! It was lovely—like getting into a dressing-gown and an old pair of bedroom slippers at the end of the day. I

wondered once or twice what I would do if the bell rang, and it was Mr. Somervell paying an unexpected call; then I knew that, although there might be a minute or two's awkwardness, it would all be jolly in the end, for Mr. Somervell was one of the real people who take you as they find you, and he would be the first to appreciate George when he got to know him—as, later, he was bound to do.

I believe there were tears in George's silly old eyes when he wished me good-night. He stood in the hall, holding his hat and my hand, and smiling down at me.

"I'm proud of you, Rose. You're a wonderful woman—and I hope the girls will see it for themselves, one day."

"You old cuckoo—you!" I said, and I kissed George, for the very first time. He turned as red as a Victoria plum, and, honestly, I thought he would fall down the steps. I felt as gay as a bird, George's happiness having made me happy, and I mixed myself a whisky and soda and lit a cigarette to see me over the washing up. For once I was seeing the future, all neat and solid and secure, not as a sort of gamble, with the dice loaded on the wrong side.

People were starting to make plans for Christmas, and several of my patients said they would hold over their treatments until after the holidays. A good many had children coming home from boarding school, and I mentioned the girls, and said my own time would be pretty full too. I got one or two invitations for them, and realised this would mean new frocks, and some sort of hospitality in return; for I did not want to put the girls in a position of accepting favours and giving nothing back. I had to sweeten the bank (a few lines from the manager had just informed me I was overdrawn forty pounds), pay off a lot of instalments on the furniture, settle a big account for Kathleen's schooling, which had somehow fallen behind (a thing I had never allowed to happen when the girls were both at The Lodge), get ready to meet my income tax and somehow scare up some ready cash to see us over the holidays. So the prospect was not exactly rosy: especially as Alice had written that the Yorkshire hospital was closing down and she hoped to be back in town early in the New Year, which meant a loss of patients, as I was bound to hand over the ones I had been "locum-ing" for her. And yet—it shows the sort of fool I was—I was a long way from

being down-hearted. Something told me it would all ~~dry~~ straight, so long as I kept my head and did not make the fatal mistake of playing for safety. "Living dangerously" had become second nature to me, and I flattered myself I had learned the art of when to plunge and when to hug the bank.

I kept a little calendar on the wall by my bed, and crossed off a day every morning. On the 19th of December I would have the girls home—really home—at last. I could hardly keep out of their bedroom that I had got ready as a surprise for them, with the peach-coloured down quilts on their beds and the lamb's-wool rugs on the floor; I could imagine Jo's squeal and Kathleen's gasp, and how we would fall over each other, opening every cupboard and drawer and examining each new thing.

Part Two

KATHLEEN

CHAPTER ONE

UNDER the green pavilions of the chestnuts went the Sunday crowds, bearing the mysterious burdens of their adult existence, slowing them down and making them heavy. The breeze sent green lightning of leaves across their faces, and passed, leaving the faces blank, or masks distorted by the grimaces of their conversations; one dismissed them for their sad folly, that had no share in the rustling joy of the morning, in the sun, whose heat on her shoulder-blades sent a little shiver of pleasure through Kay's limbs. Heavenly, heavenly first Sunday of the summer holidays!

She sat with her elbows planted on her knees, her knuckles supporting the small, pointed chin. On either side of her intent face hung the short, greyish-gold curtain of her hair, on which, and across the upper part of her face, like a veil, lay the speckled shadow of a broad rush hat. The pose reminded Richard Somervell of a portrait he had seen in some exhibition of moderns; clumsy itself, it had all the grave, unconscious grace of youth—silk-covered knees touching, long, fragile legs splaying apart, ending in the narrow, inward-tilted feet. The sort of attitude copied by adult actresses trying to play a juvenile part: disapproved by governesses, teachers of deportment and all those whose duty it is to turn the schoolgirl into a prototype of her sisters in society. "Sit up, child! You've got a back like a camel"—one could hear Rose's voice in protest against this waste of her hard-earned money.

No; the nymph crouched on a green park chair was not within Rose's vision. Nor, probably, would she approve of the figure hurling a tennis ball with a schoolboy's over-arm movement for the benefit of a leaping bundle of ragged, fawn-

coloured silk—Jo, with Richard's spaniel, Flinders; beautiful, tossing movements of child and dog, formalised, made into a pattern by distance. Richard was not the only one who smiled as he watched them—romping, crouching, running, Jo's brief summer frock blown up her bare, brown, muscular thighs and the silken fringes of Flinders streamlined by his speed.

"A penny, Kay——"

Like quiet water disturbed by the falling of a leaf, he saw the rapt oblivion of her face broken into awareness; hands drop, elbows draw in, ankles cross themselves—all without haste—until the metamorphosis was complete, the nymph put off, the well-trained schoolgirl resumed, attentive to her companion. She gave him her sweet and subtle smile, which Richard returned gravely; why, at her age, had Kay that smile? It was, of course, a mere anatomical trick—something to do with heavy eyelids and dark grey eyes and long lashes! Why the hell am I explaining Kay's smile to myself? he found himself asking irritably.

"I was only thinking. . . . As a matter of fact, I was thinking about my future."

"You're lucky. Most of us have only our pasts to think about," he rallied himself, as much as her.

"You don't have much past at my age, do you?" For some reason, she chose to take this seriously. "I'm only fifteen, and I haven't done much—yet."

"Do you want to 'do' things, Kay?"

"I'm not sure," she reflected. "It's all—indistinct. Actually, I can't imagine being grown-up at all. I suppose I might die, like Aunt Laura, 'in the bloom of my youth'?" There was a delicate irony in the tone, but his brows contracted resentfully. Like most children who grow quickly, the record of Kay's childhood had been one of ill-health.

"Poor joke. What's all this about your future?"

She was drawing off her gloves, smoothing them and laying them on her knee; she rested her folded hands lightly upon them, and Richard looked quickly away. If you must be a schoolgirl, Kay, why can't you have a schoolgirl's hands—red, a little clumsy about the knuckles: hastily trimmed into tidiness with a careless flourish of the manicure scissors?

"I want to have my own life a little longer." At the faltering note in her voice, his head came round again: "Kay?"

"I don't know how to say it—and it sounds as if I'm criticising Mummy. You won't think I'm doing that, will you? Mummy's wonderful; you do see she's wonderful, don't you?"

"Of course I do, but——"

"Then that's all right; because I couldn't say what I was going to say if you didn't. But people are bound to have their own lives, aren't they?"

"I think I see what you are getting at; but go on, Kay."

"It's so difficult to say, because—oh well, because if people want to have things their own way, they ought to have some sort of idea how they want to have them—shouldn't they? I mean, it's stupid—it's—it's *vulgar* to be different just for the sake of being different. But it's not that—truly. Oh—it's no use," said Kay despairingly. "I don't even know how to say it."

"Let's see if I can help you." He spoke after a pause, during which he fought down his joy, his indecent joy, that she had brought her problem to him. "What you really want is to be free to choose; that's all—isn't it?"

"Yes!" She drew a deep breath, grateful for his understanding. "That's all. It's not a very—unreasonable thing, is it?"

"No, it isn't." If Rose could be brought to see it that way!

"I've always looked forward to—life," said Kay, with a simplicity that forced him to suppress a smile. "You know——'The city's shining spires we travel to.' I don't mean careers, or any of the usual sort of things. I don't want to *do* anything or *be* anything special"—she emphasised the words youthfully—"at least, I don't at present. I mean, just knowing things in a general sort of way: knowing and understanding and *experiencing*."

"Well, isn't that simply growing up? Nobody can stop you growing up, Kay!" He damned his own hypocrisy for making a joke of it.

Her winged glance of impatience covered the paths and the slowly-moving multitudes.

"I'm not so sure I do want to be grown-up. Look: don't you see? Their faces are so stupid and shut, liked closed doors. As if they want to shut *everything* out—*everything*." A movement filled in the hiatus left by the words. "As if they were locked up! As if they know they're old, and they want

to be old and they don't want to be bothered with the sun and the sort of—sort of *dancing* of the grass!"

"The English face"—Richard gave himself up to sententiousness—"is notoriously incapable of expressing emotion. I dare say a great many of them are enjoying themselves, in their gloomy fashion, as much as Jo and Flinders!"

"Oh, no." The curtain of her hair swung with her moving head. "Don't you see they're like prisoners? They've never had freedom. Long ago—perhaps before they were born—somebody planned what they were to do and how they were to be, and they're just doing it, without even trying to shake themselves loose. . . . It makes me frightened," she ended; Richard had to bend his head to catch the whispered words. Something he had once read about the "torment of a child's imagination" slipped into his mind: what was that, he wondered, beside the torment of these adolescent fears—which he sought words to dispel. But were they all ghosts? For all the vividness of her imagination, Kay had never been one to start at shadows, and he felt it was wise to go carefully; to find out, if possible, if there was any foundation for the uneasiness which, undoubtedly, was there.

"You see, Mummy has worked out a sort of plan. . . . I don't mean it's bad, or that there's anything the matter with it except—it's not mine! I know she only wants us to be happy and—safe; but safety isn't living, is it? You've got to take chances sometimes, and get into messes, perhaps, and get yourself out somehow or other. It's awful to say this, isn't it? I couldn't say it to Mummy, she'd be most frightfully hurt. I do see that—considering she's practically given up her life to us——"

"Kay!" He was surprised at the sharpness of his own voice. "Now, Kay, listen: I want you to promise me something. You must promise you won't give way to that kind of muddled, sentimental thinking. Your mother," said Richard carefully, "has a very full, active life of her own, which has got nothing whatever to do with you and Jo. It is the most arrant rot to say that she has given up everything for you two. She has got her own career——"

"Which she only started for our sake." Surprising, that he had never before noticed the decision of Kay's little, pointed chin.

"Rubbish. Good heavens, Kay, I know your mother! She'd have gone mad if she hadn't found an outlet for all that energy of hers. The truth is, she's got an amazing gift for organising, and it simply comes natural to her to organise you and Jo, as she organises her own work and life. Sooner or later—I allow it seems rather soon—you are bound to show her that you are capable of managing for yourself."

"She'll never believe it," said Kay, with painful wisdom.

"I don't doubt she'll be very surprised." He admitted to himself that the prospect of Rose's surprise was formidable. "But, after all! She's too sensible not to see your point of view, if you put it clearly before her——"

The face she turned to him was a small, blank mask, guiltless of irony; he wondered if she was conscious of the unfathomable irony in her words.

"Put it clearly—to Mummy? But I wouldn't know how."

Well, there was something in that. What Rose called "a good plain talk" was too often productive, as one knew from experience, of confusion on both sides. Richard remembered "plain talks" with Rose, which had reminded him of a buffalo fighting its way inch by inch through a thorn hedge; the buffalo got there at last, but maddened, half-blinded and actually, too dazed to remember what all the fuss was about. Poor Rose!—red-faced, hot-eyed, wiping away the film that argument brought out, always, on her upper lip; baffled, a little hurt, and, finally, throwing it all off with her deep-chested laugh—"Go on with you!—getting me all worked up about nothing!"—making a bagatelle of all her opponents' most passionate arguments and convictions, sweeping all gustily aside with a kiss or a pat, and continuing along the track of her own unshaken and unshakable opinions, as if no one had said a word.

"The worst part is," Kay was saying, "I see her point of view. She's only got Jo and me, and I suppose it's natural to suppose she'll go on having us. . . . *That's* what I'm afraid of. I've seen the signs already."

"And what are the signs?" he asked, with deliberate lightness.

"Well, for one—this thing about my leaving school next year."

"Next year's a long way off——" began Richard, and was checked by her look that reproached him with failing her.

"But I want to stop until I'm seventeen, and take matriculation."

"Why, Kay . . . do you *like* school?"

Startled, as though sensing a criticism, she replied:

"Why? Oughtn't I to?"

For God's sake, child, he wanted to say, don't appeal to me as though I were the final arbiter of your existence! A sullen resentment of his own futility swept over Richard; he leaned forward abruptly, seeming to concentrate on the business of drawing some complicated and foolish pattern with his stick in the dust at his feet. The even voice went on:

"One's got to learn things—and you can't go to school twice."

"But why do you want to matriculate? You're not going to be a blue-stocking, are you?"

"Oh, no!" She appeared to find the suggestion amusing. "But it would finish—the design. I think each part of our lives makes a sort of a design, don't you? Like the Seven Ages of Man . . . I wonder what he'd have written, if he'd done Seven Ages of Women? Shakespeare *was* good about women, wasn't he? I do wonder what made him so good, and people like Scott and Dickens so bad. Do you know, I don't like any of Dickens's women except Lady Dedlock——"

Richard paused in his drawing to point with the stick towards Jo and Flinders, abandoned to exhaustion on the grass.

"Darling—you're sure you want to have a discussion on English literature?" Her hair swept his outstretched wrist as she bent over it to look at the time; he snatched it back, as though the faint silken contact had burned it. "We ought to be eating soon——"

"But you do see what I mean?" she hurried on, with anxious tenseness. "It's really not much use leaving school before one's seventeen—because you don't fit in anywhere. Seventeen's grown-up, isn't it, Mr. Dick?"

"I suppose you'd call it so, Kay," he muttered.

"And the out-of-school life belongs to the grown-up people, in the same way school belongs to children; there really isn't much room for you, if you're a child! I'd sooner

stop at school, really 'I would, until I have finished growing up, it's much more comfortable for everybody. Don't you think Mother might see that?'"

"Well, doesn't she?" Of course Rose didn't. When had she ever been known to "see" anything that conflicted with her own designs?

"Perhaps I don't put it the right way. You see, she always thinks I'm working too hard, and spoiling my eyes, or getting round-shouldered, or something. But since she stopped me reading in bed, I often don't go to sleep for hours, and it's that that gives me dark marks, like spectacles——"

"But this matriculation; what do you want to do with it?"

"I don't know. . . . I suppose I might have to earn my living some day? People do lose all their money and have to work, don't they? Or I might write books. . . . Mr. Dick: Mother thinks my drawing and my dancing are so good. They aren't, really; only ordinary. And I don't really want to draw or dance; I'd much rather do English literature, or languages, that I could go on enjoying after I leave school. I'd like to be able to read books in French—Mademoiselle says the French writers are the best in the world. We've been doing *Lettres de mon Moulin*, and I like it awfully. Mademoiselle says one must read French '*pour savoir l'humanité*.' I shan't have any chance after I leave school—and I *can't* get it all in in one year!"

"Don't plead like that, child; you know I'm on your side. I'll do my best; but I suppose your mother wants you at home."

"Yes, but I can't think why. She's out almost all day, and she goes out a good deal in the evenings, too. Susan and Jo and I play cards, or we knit, and Susan reads to us. Susan reads very well, but it generally has to be books Jo would like. I'd so much rather read to myself; there are such hundreds of books I'm longing to read, but I'm not allowed. You don't think I'm a beast, do you, saying these things about Mummy? but it truly seems sometimes as if she doesn't know—herself—what she wants me to do. It doesn't seem to make sense—telling a person she's nearly old enough to leave school, and being vexed if she wants to read grown-up books——"

"I say, I'm awfully hungry. Please, is it time for lunch?" Jo had come up, and stood before them, radiant, slightly panting, exuding that blend of health and clean, hot child that

accompanied her like an aura; Flinders beside her, lolling his tongue. The resemblance between them was so ludicrous that one almost expected Jo to wag her tail; energy blew out of her like gunpowder; on her round, brown face, in the crinkles of her eyes, even in the moles that drew attention to them and to the blue-whiteness of her small, even teeth, was written that determination to have a good time which even the lenient Richard had been known to describe as formidable. "I say, Flin's dying of thirst. Will they give him some water where we're going? Where *are* we going? Please can I have some orange juice with lots and lots of ice in it——?"

"Come along." As Kay rose, he realised, with a shock, that her head was nearly up to his shoulder. She's no longer a child! Of course not a child, at fifteen, he told himself impatiently, triumphantly—yet with something like fear behind the triumph.

"Oh, no, Kay, not *gloves*!" Jo was pleading.

"Yes, honestly—you've got to." Kay held out gravely the clean pair of white silk gloves she had produced from her handbag. "You know what Mummy says, and we're going—where are we going?"—her eyes signalled to Richard for support.

"Well, as a matter of fact—I thought we'd go to Hill Street."

"Do you mean to Lady Emily's? Oh! Is she expecting us?" breathed Kay. "Oh, Jo—your hair! And you've got a grass stain on your frock. Oh, dear, I wish I'd known. Mummy'd be so——"

"Never mind grass stains and hair. I thought lunch out of doors would be nicer than a stuffy restaurant on a day like this."

"Heavenly! Oh, Jo, please put your gloves on!"

"All right—all right. You're getting as fussy as Mummy," grumbled Jo, struggling to drag white silk over a hot brown hand. "They'll only half go on; will that do? I say, what fun going to Lady Emily's; did she ask us? Did she ask Flin? Come on, Flin; race you to the gate!"

A silence fell between the other two, following more sedately; a silence of which one, at least, was sharply conscious, as he was conscious of the figure moving lightly, like a shadow at his side. Kay! With your ankles of a fawn, your

still, waxen face and limp flag of silken hair falling languidly beneath the brim of your schoolgirl's hat. Why can't you hurry and grow up, Kay? Why do you cling so obstinately by your troublesome childhood?—as if you know how it becomes you, and are loth to exchange one beauty for another, untried? Or it is some adolescent instinct that warns you to protect yourself—from yourself—and—me? If so—follow it; follow it, Kay, for the love of God! So like a little gazelle you walk, putting down one foot, fastidiously, a little in front of the other so that your ankles almost brush in passing . . . your tender ankles. . . . Why do we have to walk in silence . . . ?”

“Oh, I forgot: Mummy told me to ask—have they axed you yet, Mr. Dick?” She used the word proudly, as one who has just learned its meaning. Looking down, he met the adult challenge of her eyes, strange in her childish face: as though she were saying, “Look, I am not a little girl any longer. Jo is not here, so please talk to me as you would talk to a person of your own age”—and felt virtue drained from him by the appeal.

“My department wants to send me to Geneva.”

“I know—the League of Nations.” She nodded; it was something they had learned at school. “Are you going?”

He suddenly knew he was not, and shook his head.

“No. I don't believe in it. I'd rather stop at home—if they can find me something to do.”

“Haven't you got anything to do now?”

“Not much—except occupy an office in a building that used to be a hive of misdirected energy; it's more like a mausoleum now,” he told her drily.

“‘Ghosts, like birds, flutter their wings there; on the door-post and lintel the dust lies undisturbed.’ Like that?”

“Where on earth did you get that?”

“*Aylwin*; haven't you read it? Oh, it's lovely. It's by somebody called Watts Dunton——”

“That reminds me.” They had almost reached the gate, where Jo, with the mania for perpetual motion of which Richard often accused her of having discovered the secret, was engaged in a jumping match with Flinders. He put his hand in his pocket and brought out a small, thick book. “I think you will like that—if you don't know it already.”

“William Morris?” She took it delicately; she had the

way of handling books, he thought, that had belonged to the owner of this book—in the past; folly, to see a hand, hardly less small and narrow, slip over hers. He had an impulse to snatch the book back, in protection—not of that poor shadowy hand which had passed beyond the need of such protection, alas, for ever—but of the unconscious child, turning the thin pages rapidly in search of the table of contents. "I know; he was one of the Pre-Raphaelites. Oh, what lovely titles: *The Sailing of the Sword—The Gillyflower of Gold—*"

"What is it?" Jo came prancing up.

"A book"—absently.

"Show me. Oh, poetry. •You know, isn't it funny?" Jo appealed gravely to Richard. "I just can't *manage* poetry. I do think reading's hard enough without people making it more difficult with rhymes. But Kay *loves* it," she hastened politely to reassure him. "If you don't take care she'll begin reading and forget all about lunch——"

"Look, Jo, here's a picture——"

"It *smells*!" Jo's small pug nose wrinkled with pleasure. Kay lifted her head.

"I know. It's heavenly. Whose is it? Lady Emily's?"

"What—the perfume?" He became aware of it on his hand. A quick pang went through him. "No—it's just some I happened to have—in the house."

Her amused face, which had lost its stillness, was lifted to his.

"Oh, how funny you are, Mr. Dick!" Her hand slipped into his arm. "I think it is one of the nicest things about you—you do such unexpected things. Fancy a man keeping *scent*!"

He thought, I suppose one day I shall have to tell her about Cynthia. Unless Rose spared him the trouble? He was surprised by the degree of resentfulness the possibility aroused in him.

"Plenty of men buy scent, Kay—to give to ladies."

Jo turned her kind brown face quickly.

"Do buy Kay some scent, Mr. Dick; she does so love it, and Mummy won't let us use anything but lavender water until we leave school." Kind Jo, who could never be happy without wanting to heap happiness on others. Both she and Richard were disconcerted by the effect of her words: by the flame of

Kay's face, by her quivering lips and brimming eyes, as she snatched her hand from Richard's arm.

"How can you, Jo? When Mr. Dick buys scent, he buys it for other—other people."

Richard felt his heart stop. He thought, my God. So this is it. Aloud he said:

"Dear Kay, that isn't true. I haven't given anybody scent for years—by the way, perfume's a prettier word." (Make light of it, for the love of heaven.) "I promise I'll get you some of this, if I can; but it may smell a little different, because this was opened a long while ago."

Her recovery was almost equally shocking in its swiftness: no child of fifteen, he thought, should have such instant power of self-control. He loved, although it hurt, the smile she gave him; the smile of a woman of forty, dragged up from the depths of bitter experience. Where did you learn that smile, Kay, which photographs itself with such heartbreaking fidelity on your small, childish mouth?

"Then I expect it will smell just the same, by the time I use it, for I shan't be leaving school yet awhile." It was perfect in its dignity, in its denial of the self-betrayed.

"Thank you awfully!" said Jo, as warmly as though the gift had been promised to her. "I dare say we can take out the stopper and have a sniff, Kay; or Mummy might let us put a drop on our pillows. Is it good for colds? Kay gets awful colds; it would be nice if she could use it instead of Vapex."

Blessed Jo! Borne on the breeze of her simplicity through every situation.

It was Jo, he reflected later, who saved the luncheon party—which had not been a success, and he was annoyed because Emily was aware of it. Without Jo's cheerful babble, without her antics with Flinders, it would have been something like a fiasco.

It was not right to blame it on Kay. The child was quiet, certainly—but with a quiet deriving less from schoolgirl awkwardness than from a young, mysterious dignity: a dignity perhaps out of place in one of her age, but not therefore, surely, to be condemned? He found himself blaming Emily for misunderstanding it. Or had she? Had she felt, as he did, the faint ripple of female antagonism which is supposed

to obtain in any gathering of women? The natural enmity of women was a *cliché*; poor Kay, to have her feminine heritage so early forced upon her! And by Emily—of whom, although the most feminine of women, Richard would have said she was free of the besetting weakness of her sex. Yet now and again he had caught her eyes brushing Kay with a glance of—consideration. It was not fair of Emily! A woman of her age had no right to put a child at a disadvantage.

Yet—was the disadvantage all Kay's? Ay, there was the rub—perhaps. That calm remoteness, familiar to those who knew her, was perhaps a little too much for a stranger to swallow. And what, after all, did Emily's—disaffection (he could think of no other word) amount to? She had fussed and petted and played with Jo, and been cool with Kay: that was all. In fairness to Emily, it was not easy for a childless woman of her age—his own—to strike the right note with a schoolgirl of fifteen; one swung between the Scylla of patronage and the Charybdis of that over-familiarity which every child, of every age, resents as an infringement of its dignity. At least Emily had not foundered on the latter. A few tepid advances, as tepidly received, and mutual, though courteous, dismissal. Of course Jo was much easier; her on-coming disposition, and amusingly literal approach to every subject, her positive establishment in the world of childhood, lent her an allure, from Emily's point of view, which was easy enough to understand. Kay, in her chrysalis state, presented a problem which few of her own sex would be troubled to solve; yet Richard was disappointed. He had expected more of Emily.

Of recent years he had got in the habit of going to Emily for reassurance and sympathy, and to-day, for some reason, she had withheld both from him: almost giving him the impression that she disapproved . . . of what? Surely she did not accuse him? Not *Emily*! whom he and others had loved for her freedom from the cheap, pasquinading exigencies of her sex! To whom it gave no pleasure to give a dog a bad name, and who had been known to take the sting out of many a scandalous *bonne bouche* by her mere manner of utter indifference when it was related to her? Emily was not accusing him of . . . His conscience, man-like, dodged the issue: took cover behind indignation. Irritably he picked up the calendar on his desk and wondered if, after all, he would go to Geneva.

CHAPTER TWO

DR. REMINGTON rinsed his hands, picked up a clean linen towel and sauntered from the lavatory through the open door of his consulting room, continuing the conversation he had begun before going to wash. Even in the informality of shirt sleeves, he presented the appearance of the successful Harley Street practitioner; tall, dark, clean-shaven, the type of doctor in request at dinner parties, having shed the slight pomposity of his earlier period with steadily increasing prestige. Just a little common; his critics' exaggerated this defect, his admirers laughed it aside, or—particularly in the case of women—cited it as a virtue. He stood, swaggering a little, subconscious of his physique—which was excellent: pushing down cuticle with the tip of a scrupulously manicured nail—then tossing the towel aside and picking up the coat which was flung over the arm of a chair.

"You're as sound as a nut." His hands, well-shaped, pink with cleanliness, smoothed back the becoming grey wings of polished hair from temples to crown. "A touch of indigestion—probably caused by eating too fast. I'd have thought you'd have more sense!"

He turned, on the quip, to glance at the short, compact figure of the woman who stood with her back to him, looking into a glass. The glass gave him the reflection of a square, high-boned face, a little haggard for the erect, plump body that belonged to it. Anæmic, of course; not badly, but just enough to account for the pale purplish tinge of the lips. Not a vestige of heart; organically, the soundest specimen he had handled that day.

She had got the jitters; one could see it behind her eyes—and, incidentally, there was a pair of eyes for you! A good many women would have built a reputation for beauty on eyes like those—Irish blue, with half an inch of dark eyelash to set them off, and brows above them straight and narrow as hyphens. Yet, somehow, on Rose they were not beautiful. There was something opaque and implacable about them; hard, watchful, profoundly sceptical, they gave no encourage-

ment. That, at least, as a man, was how he found it. Yet women, it seemed, saw them differently; several of his patients had surprised him by commenting on Mrs. Timson's sympathy, her kindness and understanding. They said she "gave them confidence." Good old Rose! She knew how to capitalise herself with her own sex! Yet, on the heels of the ribald reflection, it occurred to Remington, as he peered with some curiosity at the face in the mirror, that he was seeing Rose Timson's eyes, for the first time, probably as her women patients saw them: as though a shutter of glass had fallen, as though she were thinking, "Poor Rose! Poor Rose!" What ailed the woman? Of all her kind, she was not one to go in for fancies.

She turned in her quick, sturdy fashion; he saw she had a cigarette in her fingers. She stuck it between her narrowed lips, spun the wheel of her lighter with her thumb, inhaled, and puffed out a mouthful of smoke before answering him.

"It's your business to know. But I tell you, I feel—bloody."

"Smoking too much, as well."

"Don't be a dam' fool. You can't smoke when you're on the job all day, like me."

She swore carelessly, like one indifferent to criticism—or, perhaps, immune from it. He was one of the few in whose company she allowed herself a certain coarse recklessness which circumstances obliged her usually to repress: letting him see she knew her position was too strong for it to affect their professional relationship—and if you couldn't swear before your doctor, who could you swear before?

"What's shot you away, Rose?" He spoke kindly, as friend, not as doctor.

"Me? Nothing. I'm not shot away." She gave herself a shake and laughed shortly. "I'm sorry for wasting your time at the end of your day, Remmy; I just happened to be passing, and I felt so hell-fire awful, I thought I'd drop in. Silly old cow!" she apostrophised herself on a chuckle. "A good whisky and soda and I'll be right as rain."

"That's easily managed." He opened a cabinet. "Say when—it's Haig; that suit you?"

"Grand. But, look here, weren't you going out?"

He shook his head, bringing her a liberal glass.

"I was dining with Prince Sigorsky"—these names came

easily now; time was he would have slurred, or bestowed on them an exaggerated carelessness. In fact, so innocent of making an effect was he, that he missed the ribaldry of Rose's left eyelid—"but I had a telephone message; it's off. Where are you going to-night?"

"Me? Good gracious me, home—as usual. I've got the girls, you know; they're back for the holidays. And, between ourselves," said Rose, "I believe that's what's getting me down. Partly."

"Something's getting you down. What you want, you know, is a holiday," he told her. For once she did not contradict him—a bad sign, he thought, in Rose.

"It's a bit tough," she admitted, "when you've finished your day's work, having to start in and be the parent, instead of getting into an old dressing-gown and slopping round comfortably until you go to bed."

"Well, aren't they old enough to grasp that, by now?" He had mixed a glass for himself, and, strolling to the door, switched off all the lights except the reading lamp on his desk.

"No." The monosyllable was Rose all over: short, with an upward inflection—definite as the tap of a hammer. She sat in the chair his nod indicated. "No. I've started doing things in a certain way, and I've got to carry on with it. But, by the lord Harry! I'll be thankful when the pair of them have grown up, and I don't have to keep on setting an example!"

"How's Kathleen?"

"I'll be sending her along to you in a day or two. Healthier, I think, on the whole; but as thin as a lath and the colour of that paper. She's following her father's side; we were always a ruddy-faced lot."

"Growing?"

"Heavens, like a beanstalk! I tell her she's always got her nose in a book, and now there's some nonsense about wanting to stop on at school an extra year. I don't know what to make of it. When we were girls, we were as anxious to shoot out of school as peas out of a pod!"

"She's probably in love with one of the teachers; that's usually at the back of it, if girls don't want to leave school."

"Uh—is it! If there's any funny business of that sort," said Rose indignantly, "I'll have her away this term!"

"Pooh! Intellectual lesbianism (it seldom gets beyond that in girls' schools) is only a phase of development. Freud——"

"You can leave Freud out of it. I've had two girls and brought them up without Freud; and in my opinion he was just a dirty old man who couldn't do anything and tried to make up for it on paper."

"Have it your own way." Experience had shown the futility of arguing with Rose. "Well, are you going to let her stay on?"

"After next year? Of course I'm not. I've nearly ruined myself with school fees in the last seven years, and Miss Kathleen can just make up her mind to a year at home, before she goes to the art school."

"Art school? Has she got a gift that way?" It was the first time, in his recollection, there had been any talk of an art school.

"Oh, nothing brilliant"—Rose was off-hand, as she usually became when the accomplishment of her children was in question—"but the art mistress says there's something there—and—the fact is, Remmy, and you're bound to agree with me: Kathleen will never be strong enough to take up any job that means living away from home."

"I wouldn't say that." After all, one was bound to protest when words were put into one's mouth—especially when they did not particularly agree with one's opinions. "The general physique often hardens considerably when they are into their twenties."

"All right, let it harden." Her mouth set obstinately. "When she's through her course at the art school she can do her posters or fashion drawings or whatever it is at home. I know my young woman!—and I'm going to keep her under my eye until somebody comes along to take on the job for me."

"Well"—he glanced at his watch—"you know your own business best. Look here, why don't you come and have a bite with me, round the corner?"

"Because—I've told you. I've got to go home."

"Nonsense. There's—what-d'you-call-her—Susan. Ring up and say you'll be down later; we won't be more than an hour. As a matter of fact"—he hesitated, frowned, and appeared

to make up his mind before continuing—"there's something I want to talk to you about."

He caught her look, at once sharp, cautious and alert. The woman's as quick as a weasel! One would swear she knew what I wanted her for—a thing which, as he knew, was impossible.

"There's the telephone; I'll order the car while you fix it up."

When he returned to the room, she still had the receiver pressed to her ear; the lamp-light, slanting sideways, lit the fur of her upturned collar and the line of her profile: rather a good profile, thought Remington; finer than one would expect from her full face. But it was the voice which halted him: not the short, hard voice to which he was accustomed, but another voice, warm, deep, confidence-inspiring, maternal—the voice of a Rose Timson he admitted he did not know. He was faintly amused to notice that even the enunciation was different—careful: more refined, yet without affectation.

"Ask Susan to give you your suppers, and tell Jo I'll come up and see her when I come in. And listen: see she takes her paraffin. No, I'm not going to be late, and I've got something for you when I come home. Be a good girl, my dearie, and help Susan to wash up, if she wants you to—I'll have had my dinner, tell her. That's right, good-bye for now, dearie."

"Round the corner" proved to be a small restaurant where Remington was known, and where they were shown at once to a corner table. The banal, rose-coloured lighting of the table-lamp flattered Rose; as she flung back the fur collar of her coat, he noted with approval the neat V-neck of her dark gown, and the single string of pearls—culture, no doubt—that spanned the thick, wholesome column of her throat. A comfortable woman; a woman without illusions, self-contained, who, in her self-containment, made no demands on a man. He had never flirted with, or made love to Rose—not as a matter of professional virtue; one could have quite an amusing time within the bounds of discretion—but because (she would have been surprised to know it) he laid a certain value on her nonchalant, casual friendship. He could go elsewhere for emotionalism, or for physical satisfaction, and it would have seemed to him a pity to have introduced such issues into a relationship which brought both of them an easy

pleasure. Yet she was comely and friendly enough to make one realise that she must, at various times in her life, have roused amorous designs in a good many men, to whom her downright common sense and rather coarse fibre would appeal.

They had reached the savoury before any mention was made of his purpose in bringing her hither. Rose was a good companion, there was no denying it; her robust jokes, her shrewd, earthy comments on people and situations were refreshing, took him back to medical student days and to the haphazard good fellowship of the little cottage hospital where he began his career. In those days—it piqued him to remember—he might well have married a girl like Rose: perhaps Rose herself . . . well. He had staked on money, breeding and a West End practice. If he had married Rose, it might not have been Harley Street; but she would have seen to it he was a good doctor.

He told the waiter to leave the brandy on the table, took a cigar out of his case, and was restoring the latter to his pocket, when she held out her hand.

"Hi! Do you want all those to yourself?"

"What? Have you taken to them?" Much amused, he passed her the case. She helped herself, and looked at the band before removing it.

"When I get a chance. Conora; that's all right. I sometimes fancy a Henry Clay."

"Let me pierce it for you."

But when he held the match towards her, she took it from his hand. He watched her, smiling broadly.

"Who on earth taught you to do that?"

She passed the flame lightly up and down the leaf, which darkened as she spun it between the fingers of her left hand.

"Somebody I know. There you are! I've taught you something."

He drew several times on his own cigar before speaking.

"Do you see anything of Logan, these days?"

Her quick, sly glance caught him through the smoke.

"Now and again. I haven't much time for seeing people.

"You haven't fallen out, have you, you two?"

"Why should we?" Her voice told him she was on guard.

"You've got most of Logan's patients, haven't you?"

"Well"—she shrugged her shoulders—"that's her lookout.

They could have gone back to her, if they wanted. I couldn't order them back, could I?"

"You're a crafty devil, Tim!" He laughed. "I'll tell you something—which you know yourself. Logan's twice as good at her job as you are, and you're twice as good at handling people. Because why? Because Logan's got a conscience, and I'm not sure if you know how to spell it."

"Look here, Remmy; are you trying to be offensive?" For once, to his astonishment, she seemed to resent his badinage. She faced him squarely, resting the wrist of the hand that held the cigar on the edge of the table, while the other tightened on her wine glass. "Because I'm not dependent on you, you know, or anybody else. I can stand on my own feet. And I don't need to put up with a line of talk I don't care for from you or the King of England, if it comes to that."

"Oh, come, come!" he rallied her, a little put out by her reception of his joke. "Where's your sense of humour? What I've always liked about you, Tim, has been your honesty. You've never put on an act, you've never pretended to be anything but exactly what you are. Underneath this business of being all things to all people, you've been as true to yourself as Logan has been in her different way. You're a realist; you've got no bunkum about yourself or your work, and, up to to-night, you've been as ready to laugh at yourself as at any one else. I like you, Timson, and I'm damned if I'll have you turning pettish on me when I treat you to a bit of your own brand of plain speaking!"

She glared at him: then suddenly she flung back her head and laughed in the full-throated, careless fashion that made her so much less than her age. He sat enjoying her healthy, earthy laughter—laughter of an Elizabethan innkeeper's wife, laughter of Mistress Quickly, laughter of a ripe, comfortable daughter of joy, retired and living at ease on her savings: laughter which, he was ready to stake his soul, her patients never heard—or the two little girls in Plymouth Street. Heads were lifted, and smiles dawned faintly on faces turned in their direction; and Remington, who would have been furiously mortified if his wife had attracted so much attention in one of the grillrooms they frequented, was pleased by it. For there was that in Rose's laughter which blew away the chaff of

petty convention, and left the rich residue of grain mellowed by the sun of experience.

"It's a good thing everybody doesn't know me as you do! But look here, Remmy"—she sobered herself—"it's all very well saying I've got no conscience. I fit my conduct to my company, and I may say you've sent me a nice bunch of crooks in your time!"

He waived this, as of no consequence.

"Listen to me. Would there be anything against Logan's and your working together again?"

She put her head on one side.

"That's for her to answer, not me. If Alice thinks I played her a dirty trick, I don't suppose she'd want to set up in partnership. Come to that, I don't know that I want to myself. I've got my connection now, and I don't see what I'd gain by working in with someone else."

"That's not the idea. Bring some more coffee," he said to the waiter who hovered about a profitable customer, "and then let us alone. What's the job worth to you at present, Tim?"

She was evasive, paying more apparent attention to the ash on her cigar than to his question.

"Oh—I don't know. It's good enough, for me."

"I suppose you're making a pile?" If she says she is, she's a liar, he was thinking. Like all crazes, the demand for massage went in waves; just now there was a rush on electrical treatments; the L.C.C., as he had foreseen, had brought out its licence—although that, to the disgust of the medical profession, was not aimed at proficiency, being merely a measure of prevention against the use of so-called massage establishments for immoral purposes. Chromium fittings, vibratory apparatus, infra-red and ultra-violet were ousting the old-fashioned hand massage; Rose herself had been obliged to invest in a hand battery for the benefit of a few patients who, not inclined to go the whole way in exploitation of the new methods, wanted to add a fillip to their treatments; but he knew she had lost several well-paying patients—not enough, perhaps, to give reason for immediate anxiety, but a trickle is known to grow into a flood, and he had a shrewd suspicion that the tide was running out for Rose and her kind. Ridi-

tulous, of course; for the hand would always be able to achieve many things that are beyond the machine. It had also come to his ears that Rose had been making inquiries about the cost of the installation of electrical apparatus, and that she had visited at least one agent who dealt in consulting rooms in the West End. It sounded as if she was at least considering the establishment of a clinic, which would let her in for a pretty sum, and mean the sinking of a good part of the capital she must have acquired. Still, she could probably afford it . . . although it would definitely mean taking in a partner who understood work of which Rose had neither experience nor knowledge.

"What are you getting at, Remmy?" Trust her for not giving herself away!

He had settled himself comfortably into his chair; the cigar, the coffee, the brandy had produced the aura of luxury which increased his confidence, and which he knew appealed also to Rose.

"I've been thinking for some time of setting up a home for the treatment of neurological cases. My main reason for doing so is that I want to be able to follow experiments under conditions of my own choosing, instead of having to try them on patients in their own homes. It's impossible to keep a *dossier* on cases of this sort unless you have the patient under your control; and in the ordinary nursing home, even more so in the hospitals, you can't establish the conditions which I happen to think are necessary for this kind of work."

"Well, that sounds a good idea. There's always money in a nursing home," said Rose.

"Damnation, I'm not a philanthropist!" He could not help laughing. "Of course there's money in it—a gold-mine. You want the right house—not in this part, with traffic surging up and down all day and half the night; you want the amenities of a first-class hotel with the discipline of a clinic—those, of course, are the trimmings. The rest is my business, and, possibly, Logan's. I won't bother you with it; you're such a lazy slut, you wouldn't know half of what I was talking about."

"Cut the compliments!" But this was the way to talk to Rose; this suited her. She was smiling now, settled, attentive.

"To cut it short—my idea's to form a limited company, with three or four shareholders——"

"You're not inviting me to be a shareholder, by any chance?"

"Why not? It's money for jam."

"Because I haven't got a bean in the world," she answered, so lightly that, for a moment, he believed her.

"Tscha! Borrow it."

"Where from?"

"What does it matter?" This was time-wasting; his voice was impatient. "Go to the Jews—I can give you an address—I've done it myself, several times."

"Why, Remmy," said Rose naively, "I thought your wife had money."

"So she has; oodles. She's putting up the bulk of the capital. But I'd like to let you in on the ground floor, Tim, because, personal matters apart, I think you'd be an asset to us and, if you have a stake in the business, you're more likely to take it seriously!"

"M'm. To borrow money you've got to have securities." She was grave enough now.

"Well, you can manage that, surely? You must have investments, scrip of some sort; you've been making plenty of money in the last few years."

She shook her head.

"No, I've not put away anything—much," she admitted.

"What the devil have you been doing with it? I thought you were a business woman!" he mocked her.

"I don't know anything about the markets, and I'm not going to be a pigeon for the brokers!" she flashed at him.

He grunted.

"I suppose I'll have to find someone to advise you. Do you mean to say you've put all your earnings in the bank?"

"Good gracious, Remmy, you talk as if I was a millionairess! What do you suppose I've got left to put in the bank when I've kept two children in first-class boarding schools since 1913 and run a house with a housekeeper for the last four years? Never mind all that. What's it about Alice? Where does she come in?"

"She comes in, I hope, as matron; I'd have liked her to be

a shareholder, but she says, like you, that she has nothing to invest. In the case of Logan, it's probable; but as for you—houses and schools taken into consideration—I'm damned if I know what you've been doing with your ill-gotten gains, Tim, that you can't raise a few hundred to put into something that will provide you with an income for the rest of your life!"

"I dare say you are. Damned, I mean," she answered coolly.

"You must have been making most of two thousand for the last couple of years," he persisted.

"Look here, Remmy; it's no business of yours. But since you're so curious—I've had plenty of calls on my purse, outside of those of the children." She sounded almost sheepish.

"Well, well!" His surprise was genuine. "I certainly had you wrong, Tim. I never imagined you were so soft-headed as to indulge in promiscuous charity."

"Charity hell." She sat scowling through the smoke of the cigar which she held between the first and second fingers of her strong left hand. He glanced at the hand: square, well-kept, typical of the abounding vitality of the woman. "If you want to know the truth—I've got brothers, and they've got families."

"Blood thicker than water; is that it?"

"Blood my foot. They're just a set of no-good small-timers, and I don't care if I never see any of them again. I don't want them! I won't have them about me!" She spoke with unwonted violence. "And I've bought 'em off, d'you see? Oh, dear me, yes! When I hadn't a penny to call my own, I was the dog's body to the lot of them. They thought they could wipe their feet on me. There was another tune when I started to have a bit of success, and showed myself independent of them. Talk about the whirligig of time! Don't get this wrong, Remmy." She leaned her deep bosom against the table and looked directly into Remington's eyes, with a curious, youthful candour in her own. "I've got no sort of bitterness about Stan, and Albert, and Ozzy. I never wanted to humiliate them, or anything of that kind. But I was glad when the time came for me to help them. It gave me back my pride and my freedom. Take my tip, Remmy: there's no way of getting rid of people like lending 'em money!" There was no trace of bitterness in her rich laugh.

"I expect you're right. I've done more borrowing than

lending in my life, I'm afraid." Now, what possessed him to say that? It was not the kind of admission expected from a successful Harley Street man. But there was something in her plain honesty that forced honesty from one in return. All the same, his eyes slid sideways, wondering if he had spoken a little loudly.

"Are you short now?"—she took him up quickly.

"Are you going to offer me a loan?" he mocked her.

"Oh, I dare say I could raise an odd hundred——"

"Don't be a fool! You're the last person I would rook if I got in a jam."

"And don't you make any mistake: I don't go round, looking for somebody to rook me. You've been a good friend to me, Remmy; you gave me my start, and I don't forget my debts."

"Gammon. Let's have some more brandy, shall we?" He advanced the bottle towards her glass, which she covered with the palm of her hand.

"Hold on. Let's get this finished first. Leave out the question of the shares; I can't say any more about that for the present. What else do you want out of me?"

"I don't know if it's worth discussing. The proposition I was going to put to you doesn't mean much, unless you've got a financial interest in the venture as a whole." He hoped, by his assumption of indifference, to rouse her curiosity, and knew he had succeeded when, after an interval of lip-biting, she offered:

"Well—mind, I can't promise anything. But I suppose I might raise a private loan."

"I should have thought it would be easy. You're in Lois Thesiger's pocket, aren't you? And Pixie Carpenter thinks you're one of the Seven Wonders. You've got a nice, rich connection, and I bet one of them would be quite ready to stake you to a proposition like this."

"That's not my line of country." She shook her head. "No—I've got one or two other things in my mind; I'll have to think them over and see what can be done. Now, what's the other thing you've got on your mind?"

"Well, I'd like to have you on the staff, of course. That's what I'm getting at, really; the shares are a side issue."

"But I couldn't do that, Remmy! What? Live in? And who's to look after the girls?"

"No, I don't mean that. We'd have to see how it worked out; either a part of each day, or a couple of full days a week. It would depend on the cases, of course. You'd get a retainer and a percentage of the profits——"

"You mean, I wouldn't get the whole of my fee? What I charge private patients?"

"That wouldn't be economic, would it? That's why I say that, apart from holding shares, the proposition is hardly worth considering, from your point of view. Except that you'd have a settled income, instead of a fluctuating one; some people would prefer that. You're so much of a gambler that it probably doesn't appeal to you."

"Well, you don't expect me to jump at it, do you?" she said, after a further pause for reflection.

"Not at all. You had better come round one evening and I'll show you some figures; they might help to decide you." He added, "There's another consideration. You've said you're beginning to find the work heavy; well, this may be easier. It will probably mean free time, which won't tie you to the nursing home. You were thinking of launching out in a bigger way, anyhow, weren't you?"

"How did you hear about that?" she shot at him.

"Oh, I've got my spies. It's not my business to advise you, but I think it would be the opinion of most people that mine's the better offer. It need not take more than half the capital you'll need if you set up on your own; you'll have no overheads and no responsibilities outside your actual work. I should think that, after the first two or three years, the profits will be equal; eventually, they should be considerably larger. And you will still be in touch with your private connection——"

"All right, I'll think it over." She looked at the plain gold watch, on its broad leather strap, which she wore on her left wrist. "I must be off; Kathleen's a hellion about not going to bed unless I'm in." She turned to thank the waiter who hurried forward to help her into her coat—thanking him as a human being, not as a servant; the reflection of her overflowing good fellowship, which took no account of class, was on the man's face as he asked:

"Would you like a taxi, madam?"

"If you don't mind dropping me first"—Remington interrupted her answer to the man—"I'll send you home in the car; unless, of course, something's come in while we were dining."

"Don't you bother." She gave her cheerful, accomplice's wink to the waiter, who hurried in search of the commissionaire. "And, by the way: about my professional call on you—thank you for nothing!"

He chuckled.

"You can give yourself a hypodermic—I'll send along some ampoules, and next time you're in, we'll have another look at you. Not that there's a thing the matter with you, except that you need a rest. Stop a minute." He took out his diary, and Rose, glancing over his shoulder, grimaced at the blackened pages.

"Remember when it was an adventure to cycle over to the Red Lion for a cut off the Sunday joint?"

"Those were good days." Absently, fingering the pages; unconsciously the Harley Street note had crept back into his voice, the note of the present, patronising the past. "What a nuisance: I don't seem to have an evening until the 27th—nearly three weeks. That suit you?"

"Leave it," said Rose carelessly, buttoning up her coat. "I'll give you a blow on the phone, and we'll fix up a quarter of an hour somewhere. And thank you for my good dinner, Remmy."

Oh God, thought Rose, as the taxi bore her away to the outer fastnesses of Chelsea: I'm tired, tired, tired. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

"I DON'T KNOW why I've got in the habit of looking at myself lately." She pressed a loose puff a little closer above her ear. "I was wrong about this dress," she reflected. "Pink's for the young. I believe I'm beginning to look my age." With which, defiantly, she fixed a bright smile on her mouth, and looked across the room at her companion.

"Well!" Even in her own uncritical ears, her voice struck

a slightly too determined note of cheerfulness. "What's the news? What have you got to tell me, after all these weeks?"

Richard felt his own smile congeal. It was so long since he had had a *tête-à-tête* with Rose, he felt he had lost the art of it. The flow of dry ribaldries, the "back-answers" which he had gradually acquired as part of their conversational currency, seemed for the present to have dried up at their source. He smiled apologetically, leaning forward to help himself from the plate she advanced towards his elbow.

"I never eat with my tea, excepting when I come to see you!" Perhaps the compliment would tide over his social shortcomings. "News? I'm afraid I haven't a thing; you're the one for the news, Rose—considering how you get out and about!"

"Pooh! You're not interested in bedroom chit-chat!" she rallied him.

"It doesn't come much my way; I should think it's—fascinating!" He tried to meet her on her own grounds of levity.

"Well, let me see. You know Lois Thesiger is going to be married again?"

"Solness? Yes, she's brought it off this time. I suppose that means a wedding present. What would she like, Rose. You know her tastes better than I."

"I think she'd like anything—so long as it's expensive—and difficult to get." From any one else, he thought, that would be purely malicious; from Rose it's no more than a candid appreciation of Lois's tastes. He joined in her laughter.

"Never mind Lois. You've not told me how the holiday went off; did you all have a good time?"

"Oh—all right." Her tone was a little off-hand. "Jo got heat-spots and her nose peeled; the pair of them wore out every rag they've got; and I'm broke! You know what summer holidays are like—and the prices were enough to make your head swim. Oh, well. . . . What are you looking for?" she broke off to ask. Richard was staring rather vaguely about the room.

"Am I dreaming, or usen't there to be a green cushion in that chair?"

"Well, if you're not a caution!" But she was beaming, delighted by his memory. "I should think there was! A

dreadful, bright green thing somebody gave me for a house-warming present. Fancy your remembering it."

"But hasn't it been there all the time? I mean, the last time I came to tea?"

"It's been gone *years*!" And she had changed it for the expensive, mole-coloured crushed velvet, mainly on his account. She smothered another laugh. "You can't say you're very observant, can you? These covers will have to be done over again, one day soon. You can't cope with London dirt, you know; you're at it every day with the vacuum, but it seems to eat into the stuff. Still, the room doesn't look so bad, does it? It makes me laugh, to think what a bare little place it was, the first time you came into it."

"I'm glad my soapstone lady keeps her place."

"Oh, Kay wouldn't let anybody move that." She bit her lip. She had not intended to mention Kay, and there, the name had slipped out. Her mind plunged clumsily for a change of subject, but he saved her the trouble.

"While I think of it—I've got seats for *The Beggar's Opera*. It's an evening performance, but it won't matter, will it, for once? There was nothing to be had for the matinees, until after the holidays."

She said slowly:

"It's all right for Jo——"

"Hang it, Rose, at fifteen you don't expect to be in bed every night at half-past nine!"

But he had not been there for the scene, when the children were told that Susan was taking them for tea in Kensington Gardens.

"I don't believe in coddling, as you know; but I'm going to stop Kay's late nights for the rest of the holidays." Her mouth set in its thin line of decision.

"What's she been doing?" He schooled his voice to coolness.

Rose made an impatient movement.

"Oh, goodness knows what's come over her. She's so moody and excitable—it seems as if she doesn't know what to be at next. And since she's taken to lying awake at night, I don't know where we are. Susan insists on giving her breakfast on a tray, but I don't like it at all; I don't believe in getting a girl of Kay's age into slack habits."

"Have you taken her to a doctor?"

"Oh, Remington says it's just her age, and she's growing too fast. Whatever it is, she's a regular little pest these days," said Rose, with a maternal viciousness that reminded Richard of his Siamese queen, bored with her three months old kitten.

"Well, is Remington the fellow for her? I know he's supposed to be an ace as a neurologist, but I've not heard anything in particular about him in connection with adolescents. A cousin of mine took her children to Lovat Reid; she swears by him."

"Oh, Remmy's a very good fellow." Although his eyes were averted, he could imagine her stiffening in her chair; he knew her hatred of anything verging on "interference" with her plans for the girls. And what was behind her dismissal of them this afternoon, which had disorganised the whole of his plans for campaign on Kay's behalf?

He had come to the conclusion, after long and serious thought, that his best plan was to open the question of Kay's future before the three, if necessary, the four of them. He had hoped, on meeting Susan at the door, to give her a hint to abstract Jo, after a suitable interval, and keep her occupied, for half an hour at any rate, in another room; if this failed, one could only hope that Jo's ebullience would not interrupt the general trend of the discussion. He had hoped to keep the discussion on amicable lines, and that Kay, given his support, would take her share in it. He was anxious, above all, not to give Rose the impression that Kay and he had leagued together, secretly, to defeat her intentions, since he felt sure that Kay would be made in some way to suffer, if such an impression were given. Not that Rose was capable of malice, but, jealous as she was of her daughters'—and particularly of Kay's—loyalty, she would not be able to resist inflicting some of her own pain on the girl.

All of these eminently wise plans were defeated by the absence of the children, which had given him a shock of disappointment he was at pains to conceal. Surely the holidays were not so long that Rose need grudge him one of his few pleasures? And they had been away for three weeks, which meant the interruption of the time-honoured custom of Sunday lunch with Richard. It would have been a little easier, if they could have talked of Kay, but Richard, keenly intuitive,

had sensed constraint in the very crispness with which Rose informed him that she had sent the girls out for the afternoon. She gave no explanation, seeming to assume he would take it for granted; but the very coolness of her manner had made him wonder, for the first time, whether Rose was as candid as he had believed her to be. Then it occurred to him that she had, perhaps, something to discuss with him which she did not wish to speak of before the children; and he had waited patiently, increasingly mystified by the babble of small talk she produced for his entertainment, and finally convinced that there was nothing at the back of it apart from her unexplained intention of keeping his company to herself. Good friends as they were, Richard was at a loss to account for this unprecedented whim on the part of Rose.

Yet, if he did not speak now, he would be failing Kay. It was by no means certain that he would have another opportunity of conversation with Rose before the children went back to school; and, since the rule was strict about letters, unless they came under cover from parents or near relations, he would not be able to write her the results of his efforts on her behalf. He could almost feel her standing by his shoulder, feel the faint brush of her hair against his cheek, the light touch of her hand on his shoulder, as, choosing his words carefully, he said:

"Do you think, perhaps, she may have something worrying her? Something on her mind?"

She gave him a sharply antagonistic look.

"I suppose you mean this nonsense about stopping another year at school?"

"Just a minute, Rose. Are you sure it's nonsense?"

Her face was red, now, with anger, which he saw her trying to control.

"Don't let's start an argument, Mr. Somervell. I know what I've done for the girls, and what I can afford to do. Kay has picked up some ridiculous notion from one of the older girls and wants to be 'in the fashion'; that's all there is about it. She knows I won't listen to such rubbish, so I suppose she's been working it off on you."

"I heard nothing about it until these holidays," said Richard coolly, "and I must say it struck me as not a bad idea."

“Indeed! And on what grounds?” Haughty, Rose became a little ludicrous, and he had to repress a smile.

“Well, my dear girl, what are you going to do with her if you have her at home?”

“Spend a year in building up her health, and then she can do her fashion drawing, or whatever it is,” said Rose tartly. She made it evident she would not stand for argument.

“But—is Kay interested in fashions?” Like Remington, he wondered where this idea had come from.

“Did you ever know an ordinary girl who wasn’t?” snapped Rose.

“I’m not sure I’d describe Kay as an ‘ordinary’ girl,” said Richard—indiscreetly.

“Of course she’s ordinary!” blazed Rose, as indignantly as though she defended her daughter against some evil accusation. “All this bookish nonsense—bah! I’ve no patience with it. She wasn’t that sort of child at all, until I sent her to The Towers—and many a time I wish to goodness I hadn’t! A nice, simple, healthy home life was what she needed, and, unluckily, it was the one thing I couldn’t give her. Well, she’s going to have it, as soon as she’s got through this coming year; we’ll see if that won’t take the nonsense out of her——”

“There might be something in it”—he strove to propitiate her—“if you were at home yourself. But, good as Susan is, do you think she’s quite the person to put in sole charge of an active-minded, quick-witted child like Kay? There’s such a thing, you know, Rose, as intellectual starvation; and, in my experience, it’s a good deal more dangerous than the other kind.”

She was staring at him with unfeigned astonishment.

“Well! ‘Active-minded’ is about the last word I’d apply to Kathleen! Do you know she spends half the day mooning around, behaving as if she doesn’t know if she’s on her head or her heels, not answering, nine times out of ten, when one speaks to her? No, no: you’ve got the wrong idea there! Not that it surprises me; she seems to have plenty to say for herself when you’re about. No, Mr. Somervell, I know you mean kindly, and I can’t be too grateful for the interest you take in the children; but Kathleen’s my girl, and you’ve got to let mothers know best.”

Her complaisance so infuriated him that, for several seconds, he was too angry to speak.

"Well," he said at last, forcing his voice to moderation, "in my opinion, Rose, you're making a very grave mistake; not only on Kay's account, but on your own. You already have more irons in the fire than you can handle, and you propose to add another to them; you know you'll never be satisfied to leave Kay to Susan, when you get her home. You talk about building up her health . . ." What was the use of talking to Rose about a nature like Kay's, that responded with destructive ardour to every influence that crossed her path? "Do, Rose, at least think it over; remember what open-air games and the regular routine of a good country school means to a girl of Kay's age."

"I seem to remember you weren't so keen on open-air and games when I sent her there," Rose was sharp enough to remind him.

She had him there. Of course, he had hated it, when Kay was taken away from The Lodge and sent into Hampshire; it was the end of some pleasant week-end outings, when he and Rose drove over in his touring car and took the children for Sunday afternoons in Windsor Park, or on the river at Richmond. Hampshire was too far; it turned the casual jaunt into something of too much importance—this, at least, was how he knew it would appear in the eyes of certain of his friends. He had rather enjoyed being teased about his "adopted daughters," but, as a man of the world, he had sensed the moment when the teasing ceased to be innocent; when a glance, which passed over Jo, lingered with a trace of sly speculation on his dear Kay. That, my darling, is the penalty of beginning to grow up: of having a small, still, subtle face, heavy eyes and hands and feet that already make women envious. Before everything, he would have to protect Kay.

"Well, Rose, at least let us have our evening at *The Beggar's Opera*; it's the last treat I shall be able to give them before they go back to school."

"I'll have to see about it." She would give him no satisfaction. "We've got a lot of things to get in; the dentist, and the oculist for Kay; and George wants to have them down at his mother's, and there's an invitation from one of their school friends, to go to Kew; and Kay's got some craze or

other about the South Kensington Museum—I don't like all this ferreting round museums: now the weather's decent, they ought to be out of doors. . .

It's just turned out the way I meant it not to, she was thinking. Her face felt hot and uncomfortable, her eyelids prickled, and she blinked them rapidly, to get rid of the disagreeable sensation. I meant us to have a nice, quiet talk—without Kathleen chipping in and monopolising the conversation, the way she kept doing last time: behaving as if "Mr. Dick," as she called him, came to see her and nobody else! That child wants putting in her place; nobody seems to remember that children should be seen and not heard, in these days. I wanted to hear if there was any news about Geneva, and about the country place at Verney, and what his plans are for the autumn—and it's all been Kay, Kay, Kay!

The hand she gave him in farewell was hard and cool, and there was no conviction in her, "We'll be seeing you soon," or in his formal thanks for her hospitality.

Well, that was that. Why should she feel sore and disappointed, like a silly girl cheated of a sentimental hour with an admirer? As if there had ever been anything sentimental between her and Richard Somervell! The truth (she told herself) was that he had hurt her by his perfectly plain suggestion that she did not understand Kathleen; even that she was proposing to sacrifice the child's interests to her own carefully considered plans for Kay's future. People had no right to say these things—even to hint them. My God, if they knew how I've slaved and battled to do the best for Kathleen and Jo! Rose touched her eyes quickly with her handkerchief. She was not given to self-pity, and she resented it.

She had counted on this peaceful hour with Richard to get her over the shock of the extraordinary scene with Kay. Neither sensitive or nervous, Rose had been shaken by that scene with her elder daughter! It was as disconcerting as if a small extinct volcano had burst open, and volleyed flames and rock into the air. Coming at the end of a morning when Kay had been particularly quiet and absent-minded, it had shocked every one; even Susan, whom, normally, anything from fire to earthquake left undisturbed, leaned back in her chair, her lips falling slightly open at Kay's outburst.

"You mean you're sending us out so we won't see him?"

"Now, Kathleen, don't be silly. You see plenty of Mr. Somervell, and it's my turn to-day. Grown-up people don't want children hanging round all the time; he's had quite enough of you lately."

"That's not true! We haven't seen him for three Sundays. We've only seen him six—no, five times these holidays. You can see him as often as you like, when we're away."

"That'll do. Go and get your hat on."

"I'm not going to. You can't go on treating me as if I was Jo's age, and pushing me out of the way when it suits you. Mr. Dick's just as much my friend as yours; we're interested in all sorts of things you don't even know about——"

"Do you know whom you're speaking to?"

Rose was very angry. She stood up to face her daughter. It struck her sharply that Kay's head was on a level with hers; the little white face, the eyes darkened with what Rose called "temper," were no longer below her own. Her instinct to give Kay a smart box on the ear—a thing she had never done to either of the children, although she had once or twice smacked Jo—was checked; she realised, aghast, that it would be "unsuitable."

"Do you know what's the matter with you, my girl?" She forced herself to speak quietly. "You need somebody to keep you in order. Your schooling's gone to your head—see? You're so conceited and above yourself that, I tell you candidly, you're hardly fit to live with."

She paused for this to sink in; Kay said nothing, but her thin hands opened and clenched themselves again; the tip of her tongue moistened her dry lips.

"If any of us children had spoken to mother as you've just spoken to me, father would have had us across his knee. That's what you want: a father, my girl. And I've a damn' good mind to give you one, to see how you'd like it."

She was usually scrupulous about her language before the children, but Kay's white and scornful face put her in such a rage that she could have sworn full-bloodedly, for the sake of shocking her into her senses.

Kay gasped:

"Go on; get married then! I don't care—I don't care what you do! I'll go and live with"—her eyes flickered—"with

George!" Rose got the impression that this was not what she had intended to say; she had thought better of something—of what? Her hard, bright eyes penetrated her daughter's and saw them flinch. It was Kathleen's old trick of evasion. Rose bit her lip. Oh dear, I thought they'd got rid of that at The Lodge.

Jo, up to this moment unwontedly silent, piped up:

"Oh, Kay, you *can't*! You know you always say old Mrs. Glaize smells!" She appeared to have one of her brief moments of reflection. "If you go and live with anybody, I should think it had better be Mr. Dick; you know how well you get on with Jenkins."

"Hold your tongue, Jo!" Good gracious, thought Rose, Kathleen was turning positively green; she couldn't be going to be sick? Anxiety momentarily drove anger from Rose's heart. Suppose the child was sickening for something? It wasn't Kay's way to be rude. Measles? Chickenpox? That would be a nice finish to the holidays—Kathleen in hospital, Jo in quarantine and herself not able to go near either of them, because of the patients.

"Fetch me the thermometer," she said to Susan, the silent spectator of this uncomfortable scene. "Run along, Jo; wash your hands and give your hair a good brush. Now, Kathleen," she said, when they were alone, "you may not be feeling very well, but you can't talk to your mother like that. It's rude, and it's hurtful. Good gracious, I thought you were too old for such babyish behaviour!"

"Well, what do you expect, when I'm treated like a baby?" There were no signs of contrition in the set little face. "Even at school I'm not treated as you treat me at home! They don't give me rubbishy books about *The Heroine of the Fifth* and *Peggy the Guider*—or make me stop reading because it's bad for my eyes—or—or make me look silly by talking about my inside in front of people—or saying things about me and pretending I never listen! I *do* listen, if there's anything worth listening to."

"Come on, Susan." Rose took the thermometer and shook it down with an experienced hand. "Now then, open your mouth."

And then, with a shocking gesture, Kay lifted her hand and slapped the thermometer out of her mother's, down on

the floor. The door slammed. Rose and Susan stared at each other.

"Well. What do you make of that?"

"I wouldn't take too much notice of it, Mrs. Timson." Susan was calmly picking up the splinters of glass. "It's a difficult age. Whatever you say, they're inclined to take it wrong." She lifted her ruddy, Dutch doll-like face, unperturbed. "Why, I believe you're more upset than her!"

"And well I may be. The impudence of it!" Usually so neat and decided in her movements, her hands fumbled the cigarette box; she saw them actually trembling as she struck a light. Losing my temper like a fool! she told herself angrily, as she tossed the match into the fireplace.

"I wouldn't say impudence. It was something deeper than that," Susan was saying.

"What on earth do you mean by 'deeper'?"

Susan stood her ground.

"I don't know, I'm sure; Kathleen's got a lot in her that I don't understand, sometimes."

"Well, I *do*. I often wish I hadn't listened to Miss Cleveland's advice about Kathleen; all schools are mad on examinations, in these days; you'd think they wanted to make all the children into professors of something! That wasn't why I sent my two to boarding-school; I only wanted to have the pair of them looked after until they were old enough to look after themselves."

"You never know the way the cat's going to jump, Mrs. Timson," said Susan wisely.

"It's going to jump my way, or I'll know the reason why," was the tart rejoinder.

"Well, time'll show. Her father was a clever man, wasn't he?" said Susan reflectively.

"And a lot of good his cleverness did him! That child's a damn' sight too like her father at times, for my liking."

"She may make you quite proud of her, one of these days," soothed Susan. "Now I suppose we should be getting along towards the Gardens——"

"Did you ever hear anything like it?" Rose had not yet emptied herself; she needed an audience. "Just because she wanted to be here when Mr. Somervell came! You might think——"

"I wouldn't think anything, if I were you, Mrs. Timson." She was checked, she did not know why, by the steady look in Susan's eyes. There was an almost imperceptible pause, then Susan went, with her firm, stiff tread, to the door. With her hand on the knob, she turned, to smile tranquilly at Rose. "It'll all have blown over by the time we come in, and I'd say nothing more about it, if I were you. You'll see; she'll be quite ashamed of herself, and I wouldn't mind betting she'll say she's sorry, of her own accord."

"So I should hope!" sniffed Rose.

"Bless me! It does them no harm to have a blow-up like this, once in a while. Kathleen's inclined to be too shut-in; it's just as well she's got some of it out of her system."

Rose remembered her former anxiety.

"You don't think she's caught something? It strikes me she's got a temperature."

Susan's comfortable smile came to her from the door.

"All she's got is growing pains. I know 'em—I've seen plenty of them, with my young sisters. Well, have a nice tea-party, Mrs. Timson—and give Mr. Dick my kind regards, if you remember."

"Mr. Dick," that was where the children got it, of course. Down at Verney, where Susan was reared, he was "Mr. Dick" to all the village. Rose pushed aside the slight annoyance that Susan's previous acquaintance with Richard sometimes caused her, and went to change her dress.

Now, with the scent of his cigar lingering in her parlour—she used to like it; why, to-day, did it irritate her?—she went to fling open the window.

It wasn't right; she couldn't have people interfering between her and Kathleen—not even Mr. Somervell, who had been such a good friend. She had done nothing lightly, and her judgments were not lightly to be dismissed.

Of course, Mr. Somervell, with the best intentions, saw things through the eyes of his own class. Left to him, the girls would be spoiled with sheer kindness. And it was no use for Kathleen, although she had been educated with the children of cabinet ministers, high-ups in the services, even a title or two, to think that that sort of thing was going on for ever. Rose was no snob; she believed in people finding

their own level, and it was time for Kathleen to be worked in among the people among whom, normally, her future would be cast. Thanks to her mother's social activities—which had considerably increased of latter years—there was quite a nice circle waiting for her; mostly grown-up, of course, but there were quite a few lively girls and boys among whom she would naturally find her favourites and start a social life of her own.

She was getting to the dangerous age; the way she had spoken—good gracious, she might have a silly, schoolgirl "crush" on Mr. Somervell! Yes, she—Rose—must keep her eye open for that. There was going to be no nonsense with married men in Kathleen's case; there was a great deal too much of that sort of thing going on now, among the young girls. These men unfortunately married—they needed watching. The "good" ones, like Mr. Somervell, were really worse than the rakes; when they "got" it, they had it badly. . . . Suddenly the breath caught in Rose's throat.

It wasn't possible that Mr. Somervell . . . his queer, stiff manner . . . so unlike him . . . and the way he hardly seemed to pay attention to what one was saying . . . and the way he had harped on about Kay. . . . It wasn't possible that he had started . . . something . . . ?

The rage that surged up in her astonished Rose. Wounded pride, anger, resentment, for a moment had her by the throat, forced a sound from her like that of an animal. The little *biick!* The blood throbbed in her temples, and the room swam round her in waves of crimson. Then rage ebbed from her, leaving horror—that she could think in such a term of her own daughter. She felt herself beginning to cry, let out one or two hard, dry sobs that strangled her, and got up from her chair. What on earth had come over her? There was no doubt she needed Remmy's ampoules.

She went upstairs, found the hypodermic and gave herself an expert injection; gave it a few moments to take effect, then went down to the little dining-room where the cold supper was laid, which they shared on Sunday nights. The shaded electric light shone on the dishes of salad, on the children's napkin rings—"K" and "J" in twisted silver—and on the wine glasses before her and Susan's places; there was a bottle of Burgundy on the table, as well as the children's

lemon barley. Kay . . . Girls of that age often suffered from anæmia. Rose moved half-absently round the table, and set a third wine glass in Kay's place.

She went out into the hall, as the key rattled in the lock.

"Well, you're nice and late—all of you!"

Even Jo, it seemed, was for once exhausted. She stumbled upstairs quite meekly, at Susan's bidding, to change her shoes, stubbing her toes and muttering a purely mechanical "Bother, bother, bother!" at every step. Susan, with a glance at Rose, went down to the basement; and Rose, for once sensitive, unsure of herself, inarticulately humble, found her glance trembling away from Kay, who leaned against the wall, her eyes half-closed—as if she had come to the end of all.

"Mummy . . ." It was only a breath.

Rose's arms flew out—the pair of them were clinging together—both shaking in an agony of contrition, of relief, of joy. Kay's face was buried in her mother's shoulder, her thin, childish body pressed close, as though seeking reassurance of continued love.

"Oh, Mummy, Mummy, Mummy . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOOR opened softly, and let a shaft of light from the landing across the darkened room. Susan's slippers squeaked stiffly across the rugs; there was a rustle of bedclothes, a grunt, a whining mumble.

"Sh-h. Don't wake Kathleen. Here's your dressing-gown. I'll fetch your clothes out to the bathroom."

Smothered efforts at quietude; the creak of a bed; clomp of a falling bedroom slipper; "*Oh, blow!*"; floor-shaking sleepy stumble; the soft click of a closing door.

This was the best moment of the day. One could open one's eyes, look at the sunlight yellowing the drawn curtains, nozzle back into one's pillow. The warm nest of the bedclothes cuddled one like an embrace; closed door, curtains, the absence of the little, hot, rootling body of Jo from the neighbouring bed, the sounds of the wakening house, created a privacy which was luxury. One could lie and dream about

the bedroom one would have some day: with the polished wood or perhaps marble floor, a big window with sunblinds made of reeds, opening on a balcony overlooking the sea: the bedroom one would share with nobody, the palace of one's self.

Kay lay very still; nearly asleep. This was the best time for sleeping; it was easier to sleep in a room of one's own. Even if the other person was quiet, it was disturbing. Unless one was alone, one was always a little bit on guard, defending something—one did not quite know what: perhaps this house of flesh, this frail shell inhabited by someone called Kay Timson; someone who was there, always in hiding; who might escape, or be invaded, unless one kept watch.

"At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful, fortress'd house

Let me be wafted!"

Ah, yes; but *at the last*. When I am ready. Not torn, dragged, rent, like Marpessa, "from the scabbard of his limbs"! Somebody has to come, and knock softly, and wait till I answer. "Tenderly! Be not impatient!" Wafted; a lovely word, wafted. One of those words that come like the singing wind across the beds of lavdanon and lavender.

There was Jo, whistling in the bathroom, and being hushed by Susan; and her mother's brisk voice calling out on the staircase, as if to show she was not in sympathy with this lying-in-bed-in-the-morning idea, which was Susan's—bless her. Mummy, always kind, and sensible, and definite—poor Mummy; such a bore for her to have something so wavy, and reedy, and—and altogether undefined as a daughter like Kay to deal with! Dear Susan, with her funny, stiff, stumping ways, that didn't belong, really, to the Susan who lived inside. Susan was another, of course, who lived in a powerful, fortress'd house; she came out of it sometimes—when she went down to the tuppenny library and brought home books by Ethel M. Dell and Elinor Glyn and Cynthia Stockley; books Kay was not supposed to read, which taught her to read with a headlong speed—because there would only be a few minutes, while Susan was shopping, or cooking the lunch: when one

slipped into her bedroom and seized the grimy, finger-marked volumes that lay on her night table, and devoured as much as one could, before somebody called "Kathleen!" or "Kay!" and one had to rush downstairs, for fear of betraying one's occupation. There was a picture, too, in her bedroom, which belonged to Susan's "fortress'd house": a coloured reproduction, by someone called Greiffenhagen, of a man in a kind of sun-hat, with his arms round a girl with poppies in her hair. Kay suspected it was not a good picture; visits to the National Gallery and the Tate had given her intimations of virtue in painting; but she understood Susan's affection for it. M'm, yes. What was it like, she wondered, to be born, like Jo, in a green field, with an open gate in it?

The telephone shrilled through the dividing wall. Rose's energetic step mounted the stairs, crossed the landing—not noisily, but pointedly taking no trouble to be quiet. That's meant to make me feel guilty; but I don't. I don't want to be tiresome, or disobedient, but there's no harm in lying in bed. In fact, what's the use of getting up, unless one has something particular to do? This is . . . let me see . . . Monday. And yesterday was Sunday. Oh! Yesterday was Sunday.

Sunday. And he had come and gone, and she had not seen him. It was the sort of thing that seemed too bad to happen. Only eleven more days of the holidays—and one of the best had gone. For of course Sundays were the best days; they meant the Zoo, lunch somewhere in the West End, and—once or twice—a concert at the Albert Hall; or, at least, a tea party at home. And yesterday—wasted. Would he realise that, and make up for it, sometimes later in the week?

"Yes, I'll try to make it four o'clock"—Rose's voice came clearly from next door. "You haven't given me much notice, have you? It's all right; I'll manage. But I don't care about changing my times as a rule; you know what it is—one plans out one's day, and last-minute changes are a bit awkward. Very well, Mrs. Fleeting; I'll be there as close to four as I can make it."

Not ill-tempered, or petulant; only decisive. The receiver clipped back on its rest, heels tapped briskly across the floor, and paused outside Kay's door.

In a second she was curled round, cat-like, with half-buried head, but with none of the repose of the cat in her stillness. I

mustn't let my eyelids twitch, I mustn't cough. But evidently Rose changed her mind. As her heels went tapping down the stairs, Kay breathed again. Now that's over; now I can think of something else. I can think about yesterday afternoon.

I can think of his car, the black Buick, turning into Plymouth Street, and it stops when it reaches our house and Jenkins gets out and opens the door. Now he is out on the pavement—let me see: what is he wearing? It might be the dark blue, with a tiny little white line in it, or it might be the light grey. The grey, I think, because it's sunny. No, I'll make it the dark blue, because that's my favourite; it makes him look finer, somehow—finer-drawn, I mean. He's standing with one hand in his pocket and the other holding his stick and gloves; he's stooping a little, as if it was too much trouble to stand up straight. His stoop makes him look elegant—what's the word? *Dé-dégagé*. The French always have the right word—*le mot juste*. Now he's telling Jenkins what time to come back; it may be half-past five, or six, if he's going on to Lady Emily's.

Now he's ringing the bell and waiting for Susan to answer it. Susan, who calls him "Mr. Dick," and knows all about Verney, and the Court, and the iron gates you go through, between the two lodges, and the high pillars with stone owls on top of them . . . and the door opens, and it's Mummy. She's got the pink dress on, and some of the face powder we gave her for her birthday. He's surprised, but he goes into the parlour, and he looks round, and there's nobody there. And he says, "Where's Kay?"

What comes next? I don't know. I . . . don't . . . know. Does Mummy say I'm out, and does he say "*Out?*" as if he can't believe it's true? Yes, that's it. He's nonplussed; yes, that the word. Because it's me he comes to see. We both know it, but it's a secret, and he daren't say too much, in case Mummy guesses. He is wondering, "Why has Kay gone out, when she knew I was coming to see her?" Dick; Dick darling. You know it wasn't my fault, don't you? Of course I wanted to see you; to go on talking about all the things you were telling me last time—about the South of France and the carnivals and the Roman amphitheatres and the Pope's palace at Avignon and *Sur le pont*—and Tartarin de Tarascon and the Saintes Maries and momosa—all the things that aren't in any

of my books. You tell things so beautifully—differently from any one else. Your eyes seem to look in, instead of out, and a sort of smile comes on your lips; and your voice gets on one note, lower and lower—more like somebody telling the things *through* you, than speaking them yourself. "We did so and so," you say; "we saw so and so." I wish I knew who "we" was. You and . . .?

Once, when you and she were talking, Mummy said something about Lady Cynthia. Who was Lady Cynthia? Was she the other "we"? Did you and she go to France together? I thought people who weren't married aren't supposed to go travelling together. That makes it rather awkward; I feel shy about asking. Suppose Lady Cynthia was your mistress? You might be embarrassed. Not that I wouldn't understand, darling Dick! Truly, I wouldn't mind knowing you had a mistress; all the great people did—Charles the Second and George the Fourth and the Roi Soleil; and they were beautiful and brilliant, and just as important as wives. I don't think I could bear it if you had a wife, Dick—although, of course, if you wanted me to be your mistress, it wouldn't make any difference. Lady Kay—no, there's too much A about it. Lady Kathleen is better, although it seems to go with long silk dresses with taffetas frills inside them and wasp-waists and hair done up in a chignon. I wonder what Lady Cynthia was like. I wonder what happened to her. I wonder if it was terrible for her—the end, I mean . . .

"When we two parted
In silence and tears . . .

"They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me . . ."

Oh—awful, awful. Parting is so terrible, always . . . and perhaps she died? Oh, poor, poor Mr. Dick! Yes, now I come to think of it, I believe that must have been it. I've suddenly remembered something.

He'd asked us to tea in his flat, and we were late, because we couldn't find a taxi; and when we went in, he was reading by the fire. I asked him what he was reading, and my feelings

were rather hurt because he said I wouldn't understand. Afterwards, while he and Jo were playing chess, I found the book, with the marker in the page he had been reading, and a pencil mark round one of the verses.

"Sleep, and if life was bitter to thee, pardon,
If sweet, give thanks; thou hast no more to live;
And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.
Out of the mystic and the mournful garden
Where all day long thine hands in barren braid
Wove the sick flowers of secrecy and shade,
Green buds of sorrow and sin, and remnants grey,
Sweet-smelling, pale with poison, sanguine-hearted,
Passions that sprang from sleep and thought that
started—
Shall not death bring us all as thee one day
Among the days departed?"

I don't know what it means even now, but it was so beautiful, I learned it by heart. Then he came and took the book away, when I was trying to read some more, and said, "My dear Kay, Swinburne isn't considered literature *pour la jeune fille*!" I wish I knew why all the stuff "*pour la jeune fille*" has to be dull or—or downright silly. It's a perfect miracle we ever get to know anything. I wonder why he marked that verse; I had a sort of feeling it had something to do with Lady Cynthia; was she the person "among the days departed"?

Is that Susan, bringing my breakfast? Not yet. Well . . .

We're in a train, on our way to the south of France. As a matter of fact, we're *in* the south of France. It's a first-class carriage, and we have it to ourselves, because Dick gave the guard some money. There's the sea on one side, as blue as a turquoise, and everything smells of mimosa. No—it's partly the scent—perfume, I mean, he gave me: that I have on my handkerchief and the little dabs behind my ears. He showed me about that when he gave me the bottle. There's a heavenly heat, that makes the trees and the water sort of dither when you look at them. He's holding my hand—no, he's not; it's too hot, and we'd be sticky. Why do things like sticky hands happen at—those sort of times?

Presently the train stops at a station, and we get out; there's

a great white car waiting, and we get in and start to rush along that road—what's it called? Corn—Corn—something. Then we begin to climb up into the mountains, and it gets lovelier and lovelier—all purple, because the sun's setting. He asks me if I'm tired, and I say No, although I am, just a little bit tired—with happiness. Now we see lights through the trees, and there's a drive, and—palms, I think; and the car rushes up that, and there's the villa. It's white, and it's got a terrace, but I can't see very much, because by now it's nearly dark. The stars are enormous. There's just a bit of a moon. We go up some steps, and there's a table on the terrace, laid for two people: with pink-shaded candles and lots of silver and wine—the sort we had at Claridge's; that was the first time I'd ever tasted wine. "Didn't I tell you you would drink this some day on a terrace overlooking vineyards?" Yes, but you didn't say it would be by starlight.

For a little while nobody comes. He takes me in his arms, and says, "This is your villa, Kay, where we're going to live" . . . and kisses me . . . and kisses me . . .

"Well, are you awake yet?"

Drowsy mumble; Susan stumping across the room with the tinkling tray; planting it down on the bed-table, going to draw back the curtains. The rings clash, and the sunlight enters like a blow.

"Oh, no—it's in my eyes!"

"Chase the sand away." But Susan moves the curtain just enough to cast a kindly shadow across the head of the bed. "Talk about the Seven Sleepers! Do you know you've been asleep—let's see—nearly eleven hours?"

"Oh, no, I haven't." Fretful, languid, she allowed Susan's firm arm to lift her up against the pillows. "I heard eleven, twelve and one and two strike."

"I expect you were dreaming," said Susan comfortably, as she settled the tray across Kay's knees. Those dark rings under the eyes weren't healthy for a child of that age. "Now, here's your grapefruit; don't get the juice on the sheet—here, let me fix your napkin for you."

"Oh, *Soo-san*——"

"Now, don't say I've given you too much toast; you're to eat up every bit of it, with that cream and jam."

"What sort of jam?"—She pouted.

"Black currant. Your mother's gone, and Jo's just starting her practising"—a reluctant tinkle of Matthey exercises came faintly from the floor below—"and I'll be ready to go to the shops in an hour. So be sharp, and don't keep me waiting—I've got to get a beefsteak pudding on for lunch."

Supposing he rang up while they were out? He had never done such a thing, but he just might, because of yesterday. He might have spoken to Mummy about school; he might have something to tell me; he might say we can go somewhere to make up for Sunday; he might . . . a wild tangle of possibilities fluttered through Kay's brain.

"I don't think I want to go to the shops this morning, Susan." That was no use, of course. What reason could one give? A headache would not do; not having finished one's holiday work was not a matter that would carry weight with Susan, taking her cue from Rose.

"Come along," said Susan kindly. "You aren't likely to have good nights unless you take some exercise. It's a pity you can't get your riding every day, now you're missing your school games."

"I hate riding"—an observation sensibly ignored by Susan, as she went out of the room.

Of course one didn't care for jog-trotting up and down the Row, with the groom in the middle, and Jo on a pony as fat and brown as herself, on the other side! What a good thing riding was so expensive in London that Mummy only made them go on Saturday mornings. Kay's horse was not a nice one, either: a silly, hard-mouthed thing with an action like a wooden toy. (But we ride together on wonderful horses; they stretch out like greyhounds along the broad green turf—one silver and one black as ebony; the silver one always manages to finish ahead, because it carries less weight. "You ride like Diana, Kay darling; I've never seen any one ride so marvellously as you.")

Going to the shops! And what then? Come back, make our beds, and practise—that will take until about a quarter to one and if I'm quick I might get ten minutes' reading before lunch—then lunch—and then?

It was a great theory of Rose's that the girls should have some definite occupation on each afternoon of the holidays. She did not hold with their drifting about, "slacking" she

called it, from morning to night. Even if it was only going with Susan to feed the birds in St. James's Park, it had to be something definite. She did not take any particular interest in it afterwards; attempts to describe visits to a cinema or exhibition were met with an absent, "Yes, dearie—very nice," and an inquiry of Susan whether Kay had had her malted milk at eleven. She was fond of saying, "I like the girls to have plenty of interests," and honestly considered that, in providing the opportunities, she was doing all that could be expected of her. If weather, or some other unforeseen cause, interfered with the planned expedition, Susan, by instruction, took charge. "Kathleen, you've been poring over that book for an hour; why don't you have a game of ping-pong with Jo?" "Now, you two, you've been at it quite long enough; sit down and do a bit of knitting for a change." A change! A change! It was almost like being at school: except that the time-table was a vast, arbitrary thing against which there could be no rebellion—treating one person the same as another. Whereas Susan's method seemed just to chop the day into restless little bits, because of some hazy idea that keeping on doing one thing was "bad" for you.

Oh, to be able to take a book, and curl up somewhere, undisturbed, and read the hours away! The tears gushed to Kay's eyes. She said aloud, with the tragic emphasis of youth, "I'm wasting my life!"

It was one of Rose's late nights; recently, she had been booking more appointments in the evening, less in the daytime. A year ago she would have refused them, but she was shrewd enough to recognise that she had reaped the harvest of that particular tide, and must cast her net elsewhere. The cases she was now getting were mainly business women, who wanted treatment after their working hours; she charged them the same as she had charged her rich, gullible clients, and found them willing to pay, but more cautious about the expenditure of time than of money. If the head buyer of one of the principal West End stores booked a course of six treatments, there was no question of persuading her to continue them for six months, a year—or until a fresh craze took her fancy. So Rose had to keep continually on the look-out for fresh "customers"; which, instead of depressing, stimulated

and kept her "on the stretch." In many ways, she found her new connection more rewarding; the women who now came to her were intelligent and energetic, they co-operated, and produced better results, a state of affairs which built up Rose's confidence and her self-respect. For the cynicism with which she regarded her wealthy "time-wasters" had not entirely sapped her interest in the work; and, now and again, an impressive result re-kindled her enthusiasm, and obliged her to take it seriously.

Her last appointment on this particular evening was at a flat near Marble Arch, and when she came out it was dusk and, for once, she felt exhausted. She looked at the time. There was time to run into Flora's for a quick drink before going home.

In Plymouth Street, Susan drew the blinds, and looked at the table, to make sure she had forgotten nothing. Imperturbable in herself, she had a vague idea it had been rather a trying day. Jo had developed a gumboil, which made her fractious, and Kathleen had been more than usually "moody," to use her mother's favourite word. They had been to a "picture," in one of the cinemas off the Kings' Road, and it had been dull, and, in any case, above the head of Jo. Susan had taken them down to the Embankment for "a breath of fresh air" before tea, and both had dragged and lagged until even Susan's patience was nearly exhausted. Kathleen insisted on walking by herself, and kept stopping to lean on the stone parapet and gaze at the water.

It was a good thing, thought Susan, that the holidays were nearly over. It was no use pretending they had been a success—not even the three weeks up at Rhyl. A pity it couldn't be some tiny seaside place, where the cost was much cheaper and the children could rush about by themselves and wear bathing suits all day. But Mrs. Timson did not agree with that; she liked them to be somewhere where "something was going on"—band concerts on the pier, nigger minstrels, pierrots, fun fairs; she really loved, during her own holiday, to give the girls what she considered "a good time," and, except for the first day or two, which she usually slept away in a deck-chair on the beach, she kept them all "on the go," and did not seem to care what she spent to make everybody jolly. Such a pity. There wasn't a more generous person in

the world; but she liked the generosity to follow her own pattern. She didn't seem to understand that the sort of holiday which suited her, and perhaps grown-up people in general, was not quite the kind of thing for two little girls, who wanted freedom, and the kind of cheerful, haphazard time that Susan remembered in her own and her sisters' holidays.

"If I go to bed at the same time as Jo, I suppose I can read until Mummy comes in?" Susan recognised the note of ultimatum, and, wisely, took it in her stride.

"I suppose that means you've got something in particular you want to read. Well, what is it this time?"

"Oh, don't read, Kay," whined Jo, whose gumboil was really hurting her very much. "When you're reading you always want everybody to be quiet! Tell us about Verney, Susan." Jo, at thirteen, had still the small child's love of "a story."

But Kay's mood had mysteriously changed; she turned from the glass where she was brushing her hair; turned with her sweet, singularly cajoling smile, which transformed the habitual blankness of her pale little face.

"I've told you everything by now," Susan was saying.

"Oh, no, Susan! Tell us about the Court, and the time you went to the servants' ball!" She flung herself across Jo's bed, where the latter was reluctantly pulling her petticoat over her head.

Susan picked up the discarded garment, dropped it in the linen basket, and, after a moment's hesitation, settled into the basket-chair beside the empty grate.

"Well—you know how they were." One could tell, with Susan, that she enjoyed these moments of reminiscence; her position and her voice both assumed the rather prim, careful style she brought to recitals of the past—as if, for the time, she went back into her girlhood, when manners were important, and her schoolmistresses had taught her to frame carefully her answers to their questions. Kay, prone on the bed, gave a little flounce of pleasure; Susan, at her best, and in her different style, was nearly as satisfactory as Mr. Dick.

"There was a very large staff at the Court," began Susan carefully. "And every year, just before the Christmas house party broke up, there used to be this big ball. All the servants

from the houses around were invited, and the people from the estate, and the tradesmen and their families. The house party had early dinner, and when everything was cleared away, the servants could get ready to enjoy themselves." Brought up in the art of entertaining the young, Susan was conscientious about her detail. "The ball began at nine-thirty, and there was a buffet supper at midnight, which was served by waiters hired from town, so that the staff should not be obliged to interrupt their pleasure and wait on the company—which was a very large number indeed."

"A hundred? A thousand?" Jo, passionate for exactitude, broke in.

"I couldn't say, to a score or so." Susan was scrupulous. "But as there were more than fifty employed in and out of the house, I dare say there would be between two and three hundred. It was quite like a public ball."

"Golly," said Jo.

"Go on, Susan." Kay always found Susan's formal, leisurely recitations fascinating, in some strange fashion she could not express, even to herself. It was like reading an old story book.

"Well, you know there were nine of us," said Susan, placidly. "Eleven, counting Mother and Father; and the three youngest, who were, of course, too little to go to the ball. But even so, it was too many. Think of it: eight Claybornes marching up to the Court! It would have seemed like an army. We were all invited, because the elder Mr. Somervell—Mr. Dick's father—was a very hospitable gentleman, and would not hurt anybody's feelings. But Father said five (counting himself and Mother) was plenty; so we six elder ones had to draw lots. He put about a dozen strips of paper into his top hat he wore on Sundays, three of them marked with crosses; and I was lucky enough to draw one of the marked ones.

"Wasn't I excited? I was only just seventeen, and I had never been to a ball in my life. Of course, I hadn't got a ball gown, but I had a white satin blouse, all ruched, with a beautiful guipure yoke, cut square, with gathered chiffon round the edge. I'd have liked to take the lace out and make it 'low' but Mother wasn't having any of that. So off I went, in my high neck and my waist pulled in; with a black silk

skirt of Mother's about five yards round the hem. I frizzed my hair and pinned it in what they called a 'tea-pot handle.' I must have looked terrible!"

"I bet you looked lovely." Jo ceased sucking her gumboil, to be complimentary.

"I expect **you** looked just like one of the illustrations to *Peter Ibbetson*."

"Shut up about Peter Ibbetson; go on," said Jo.

"I had been told how these things went. When the band struck up the first tune, Mr. Somervell asked the housekeeper to open the ball with him, and the butler went and bowed to madam and asked for the honour; and those two couples made a complete turn of the floor before we joined in. It was Mr. Dick's business to ask Mother, because we were supposed to be the most important family in the village; the oldest, anyhow—going right back to King John. Some of the tombs are in the churchyard—hardly thicker than paper; all worn away by the weather.

"Well, it happened that very morning that Mother had had an accident with a kettle of boiling water. One of her feet was all bound up, and it had fairly tormented her on the way to the Court. So, although it must have disappointed her bitterly, she had to ask to be excused, and Mr. Dick said something kind, and was just going to move away, when Mother said, 'I'm sure, sir, that one of my daughters would be honoured to take my place.' It wasn't that she wished to push either my sister Lucy or me forward; she was always for keeping us quiet and in the background. But I knew what was in the back of her mind. She was afraid Mr. Dick would ask the head gardener's wife, and she was determined his first partner should be a Clayborne, not somebody who was only a newcomer to the village—and no ornament at that!" The glow of an old internecine feud broke for a moment the calm thread of the narrative and heightened the red on Susan's cheek.

"Oh, now—this is the exciting part——"

"So there was I (for, as I was the elder, the honour naturally fell to me), who hardly knew the waltz from the veleta, stepping out on the floor, with Mr. Dick's arm round my waist."

With his arm round my waist. Yes: with *your* arm round

my waist. The slow foxtrot is our favourite, isn't it, Dick? With one of those funny, muffled tunes—and just a little bit off the beat. On a shining floor with dim lights—or the kind of light that flickers like a snowstorm all over the dancers.

"It was a wonderful spectacle. I've told you about the great ballroom at the Court, with the diapered ceiling, and the lights hanging down in clusters, like diamond necklaces. All down one side there were tall bay windows—I forget if there were five or six of them. When there were summer dances, I've been told these were open, and the young ladies and gentlemen used to stroll out between the dances and flirt on the terrace."

Me in a low gown, and you—perhaps you'd have a gardenia in your buttonhole; and you'd take it out and give it to me, and I'd wear it in my hair for the rest of the evening and keep it . . . and keep it. . . .

"Perhaps the men were not so smart, but the women were elegant. Those were the days when you held up your train with a little loop of ribbon, if you had a real evening gown. Most of us hadn't, but our skirts were real silk, and the way they flew out and rustled like a grove of birch-trees when we swung round, was beautiful. Mrs. Bannerman, the housekeeper, was a most stately old lady; she wore a black brocaded satin, as good, I'm sure, as anything madam had in her wardrobe. Being young and pretty confident of myself, I was quite satisfied with my magpie effect. I had a compliment from the head groom, too, who was supposed to be a very supercilious young man, who thought himself too good for the village girls. 'I had no idea you were such a dancer, Miss Clayborne!' he said to me. 'I'd heard you were too bookish.'"

"You weren't *really* bookish, were you?" This seemed to fill Jo with misgivings.

"Well, I'd been to boarding school, which was thought rather out of the way for people in our position."

"Tell us some more about the clothes," Kay prompted.

"There was a sky blue, I remember—but the most striking figure was the French maid. She was all in black and red—she had a very good figure, and the cut of her gown set it off to perfection. Like many Frenchwomen, she was very plain, and I suppose the stiff loops of black satin ribbon standing up from her shoulders, nearly as high as her top-knot, did make

her look rather ridiculous. The village was always ready to make fun of Mamselle, as we called her, and there was a lot of smothered giggling at her stylish get-up and her exaggerated manners."

"Whose maid was she?"

The eyes of Kay and Susan met. There was a barely perceptible pause before the latter answered.

"Just one of the ladies in the house party. Well, we pranced about, and after the first dance or two, the gentry sat on a sort of dais at the end of the room and watched us enjoying ourselves."

"Who were the gentry?" Kay persisted.

"Oh, Mr. and Mrs. Somervell's friends, and the vicar and his wife, and a few people from the next county——"

"And Lady Cynthia? Was she there?"

Susan moistened her lips.

"What did you say?"

"The French maid: I suppose she was Lady Cynthia's?" Why should she suppose it? Yet it did not take Susan's silence to satisfy Kay that her shot had found its mark.

Susan's expression had veiled itself, as if she was thinking. Jo sat cross-legged, blissfully unconscious, cleaning her nails with the point of a file. Kay's heart thudded against the back of her hands, which were folded under her chest; motionless, prone, she lay like a little sphinx, her eyes fixed on Susan's face, as though she would break from that polished forehead, those wooden, ruddy cheeks and little bud-like mouth the secret they casketed. And the door opened, and Rose came in.

Jo flung down the file and held out her chubby arms.

"Hallo, Mummy! Susan's telling us about the ball at the Court——"

"——and all the dresses——and the French maid." Rose turned to meet the challenge of her daughter's eyes, the nervous smile on Kay's lips, the husky defiance of her voice——"and Lady Cynthia."

"Oh, yes." Rose stripped off her gloves and tossed them on the dressing-table. "Mr. Somervell's wife."

A whole world turned to black ice.

"You knew he was married, I suppose?" Her eyes were on

Kay in the glass; at the spasm which passed over the child's face, her own brows knitted. Her heart quickened.

"Of course I did."

Rose turned sharply.

"He told you?"

"No."

"Then how did you know?"

"I don't know. I just—knew," she stammered.

Oh Dick, Dick, why didn't you trust me? I'd never have told a soul. "Sick flowers of secrecy and shade . . ." Now I understand. Now I know you can't ever marry me. But it won't make any difference, will it? It won't make any difference to us, will it, darling Dick?

"All right." Rose spoke sharply. Whatever happens, she told herself, I won't give way to the thoughts of yesterday. "I'm ready for my supper, Susan." She drew her aside as they went out on the landing, pushed her into her own bedroom, and closed the door. "What's it all about? Did you tell her?"

"No, Mrs. Timson. I wouldn't think it my business to gossip about Mr. Somervell's affairs." For all Susan's control, the rebuke crept out between the words.

When, at last, Rose was alone, she wrote a letter. She detested letter-writing, preferring to use the telephone; but on this occasion, she preferred, for once, to trust to her pen:

"Dear Mr. Somervell,

"Since you mentioned the theatre I have remembered the girls are already going out that evening. I am afraid they will be back too late to go to the play. They would be very disappointed if they knew, so perhaps it would be as well if we say nothing about it. With very many thanks for your kind thought,

"Yours sincerely,

"ROSE TIMSON."

She read it over, approved, and sealed it into its envelope, and, after a moment's reflection, lifted the receiver of the telephone. . . .

"Hallo. Is that you, George?"

CHAPTER FIVE

"YOU DO IT once too often, and then it's bingo," gloomed Flora. "Archie What's-it's properly cut up."

Rose was not put out by this abrupt form of greeting. Flora dispensed with all verbal conventions; she just looked up when one walked into the room and said the first thing that came into her head, regardless of whether it was six weeks, six months or six years since she had seen one. To-day, to-morrow and forty years ago had all merged for Flora—saving her, perhaps, a lot of trouble.

Rose looked round the unwontedly empty room.

"No company to-night?"

"They'll be along later," said Flora dimly. "Aimée Tiddley-push; you know who I mean."

"Oh—Aimée Wakeford." Flora's line of conversation often had the curious effect of making one feel slightly intoxicated. But people were rarely sober at the *Debrett*; it was as though they went there to escape the curse of sobriety, and if they had been sober, they would probably not have gone there. Rose found something in the slack, good-humoured, unmoral atmosphere which gave her what she needed: escape from the rigours of her domestic and professional life. Too wholesome to be disturbed by viciousness, liking alcohol only in moderation, she went to Flora's in something of the same spirit that another type of person would have gone to the theatre: to be entertained. Indeed, she often told herself that there was nothing to be seen on the stage which, for amusement, could compare with an evening in Flora's parlour.

"I never remember names," Flora was saying resignedly. "Would you like some champagne, dear?"

"I'd sooner have a whisky and soda, if it's all the same. I'm all in."

Flora raised an arm and pushed a bell-button behind her head; the action revealed a figure which, still fine and pure in its gaunt outline, must have been ravishing in her youth.

"You should take to champagne; it's more nourishing. Poor kid, she was fond of her Bollinger!"

It seemed necessary to make some attempt to unravel this. Loosening her scarf and pushing the veil up over the brim of her hat, Rose smilingly inquired whether Flora was still talking about Mrs. Wakeford.

"Haven't you heard?"

Rose shrugged her shoulders; she could guess the kind of thing.

"Oh well, they've had their eye on her for a long time—in spite of the licence." Rose chuckled. "Fancy giving it to her! That was a nice piece of work on the part of somebody."

Flora's unsteady eyes focused; an obvious effort of understanding took place behind the sphere of China blue.

"What's the licence got to do with it?"

The waiter shambled in, whom Rose recognised from her first visit; greasy, shabby, morally and physically dirty, he had an air of having stepped out of one of the grosser cartoons of Rowlandson.

"Fetch the Vat 69 and a syphon. And fetch a bottle of Pol Roger."

"You've 'ad it all," sneered the waiter.

"You're a bloody liar. They're all bloody liars," she explained to Rose amiably; the waiter dawdled out, unmoved. "What's it matter? Everybody's a bloody liar—except Aimée. Well, maybe her too—but you can't say those things about people after they're gone."

"They've got her, have they?" Rose spoke easily; it is always comfortable to look back upon the proofs of one's own good sense.

"Got her? She's dead."

A shiver took Rose unaware. A second later it was gone—shrugged aside, by curiosity. Why indeed should she feel anything about the death of a woman she had met only once, and who had inspired in her nothing but a feeling of dislike? Yet a curious thought—for Rose—came into her mind: that death was more sinister when it laid its touch upon the evil than upon the good. Making no claim to religious convictions, the methods of her early upbringing were no doubt accountable for her healthy, if superstitious, belief in hell fire and the way of the transgressor: as they were for her invariable practice of taking the girls to church on Sunday mornings, subjecting herself to boredom secretly relieved my mental cal-

culatation of the week's accounts, because church was "the right thing" for children of that age.

"When did she die?"

"The other day. Somewhere abroad," said Flora indifferently. "Paris, I expect. I've heard it was the same man that finished poor little Thingummy—you know: the one that was engaged to young Lord Who's-it. Lovely girl. It's a bloody shame. Poor old Aimée."

"But——! However old was she?"

"I dunno."

"I took her for forty-six or -seven at least! She looked younger, of course; but it was her eyes—they gave her away."

Flora's speculative blue eyes again sought Rose's, and it struck the latter that those eyes, belonging to an old woman to whom corruption was second nature, who in her time had flourished on human depravity, were as pellucid as a child's. Flora's saving grace was that she was born without a conscience: the omission which Remington, only half in jest, had ascribed to her—Rose. Only she knew how far she was from that crystalline immunity.

"Oh no, dear, she couldn't be that age. I've known Aimée since she wore pigtails. How old are you, dear?"

"I'll be forty-three this year." Goodness, thought Rose, I'm getting to a time when a woman doesn't like admitting her age! The stab of admitting to it to Flora had taken her by surprise.

"Fancy. I'd have put you older."

Rose forced a laugh.

"You get to look more than your age, when you've got a job like mine."

"You keep your skin and your eyes, and you don't have to worry," said Flora, more encouragingly. "Lovely skin you've got, haven't you, dear? That's what the duke was saying the other night, after you'd gone. Now, what about that?" She bestowed a graceless nudge on her companion. "He's all at a loose end now Maggie What's-it went off with you know who. I'll tell you what; we'll fix a little supper party one night——"

"You're a good old cow, Flora." Rose laughed, as she bent forward to open the bottle the waiter had slammed down

at her elbow. "You've been a good friend to me—though if I'd taken some of your advice, I'd be in Holloway!"

"Let folks go their own way: that's my motto," said Flora. "If you'd listened to me, you'd be going round in your own Rolls, instead of those mucky taxis. Well—here's to poor old Aimée. No, I don't mean old. She can't have been more than a bit over thirty. Makes you see red; it's all the fault of a . . . government that won't let you live your life the way it suits you."

Rose felt a faint sickness, and gulped her whisky. For a moment the Debrett and its clientèle had ceased to be an amusement; as if the lid had slipped sideways, revealing sights that revolted even her far from squeamish stomach. All that fun of watching people get tight and planning to go to bed with each other—and then, after . . . It was what came after that was so slimy. If it came to that, the whole business was slimy; one went and sat and laughed—but, "deep down inside," one despised the whole boiling. It gave one a sort of a kick; that was what one went for. It was fun, being vicious by proxy. But, now and again, it was inclined, as in the present instance, to leave an uncommonly nasty taste in the mouth. Maybe I'll stay away for a bit, thought Rose, as she gave a quick glance round the room which was still, surprisingly, empty.

It was funny, she had had an instinct about coming here to-night. It was always something of a problem, getting Flora on one side when she had her visitors, but here, for once, was fate, playing beautifully into Rose's hands. Now the main thing was to get at Flora before the Pol Roger had got into its swing; while she was still, for Flora, fairly consecutive.

"You've often said you'd help me, Flora, if I needed it." She spoke with an unusual degree of diffidence.

"I know I have, dear, but you're such a damn' fool about taking advice," said Flora amiably.

"It's not advice this time. It's money."

"What do you want? A tenner? I'll send that lazy bastard Jules to the till."

Rose leaned forward hastily, to check the hand which was again groping its way towards the button.

"A lot more than that. Listen, Flora; I've got to tell you about it before the others come in."

An unexpected attentiveness had come into the old, illusionless face.

"What do you want it for?"

"I'll tell you. But do for goodness' sake pay attention to what I'm saying, for if anybody comes I'll have to stop, and perhaps we won't get the chance of talking again. A doctor friend of mine is opening a nursing home."

The bright blue eyes stared fixedly; then an eyelid fell slowly over the left one.

- "With a little something extra on the side—eh?"

Rose choked back a laugh.

"I suppose I'll never convince you it wouldn't pay me not to be respectable?"

Flora nodded slowly.

"You know your own business, dear. All the same, I think it's a pity——"

"Never mind the pity. Good God, Flora, this is a Harley Street man! Do you think he'd risk ruin——?"

"Plenty of 'em are doing it." She wagged her head wisely. "And they ain't being ruined, either! I could tell you some stories—listen; it's not the big fellows that get themselves into trouble, it's these little places round——"

"I wouldn't touch them, big or little, with a barge-pole," Rose interrupted. Flora turned sulky.

"Well, if I could do anything to help poor girls like Aimée——"

"I wouldn't lift a finger for people like Aimée Wakeford if I could! Take that what way you like, Flora. I think it's a damnable thing that when a poor bit of an ignorant girl gets herself into a mess nobody can, legally, do anything to get her out. I'd help that kind! But it's too damn' dangerous in this country, and I've got my own reasons for keeping well out of it."

"Well, don't lose your temper, dear. Have another drink."

But Rose moved the empty glass aside. She began to talk quickly, but taking care to emphasise her points. She knew Flora had the reputation of being no fool when it came to money, and it had struck her some time ago that, if she did not care to risk her own, there was no one more likely to be able to contact some source to which it might be possible for Rose to apply.

She had made up her mind that it was no use investing some pretty sum in Remington's venture. He had shown her the figures he had promised, and, although she had always known that the nursing home game was a paying one, she had not realised how paying it could be—even run on relatively honest lines, as he seemed to propose to run it. For the first time she had glimpsed a security which, up to the present, had eluded her, and, although she had made no promise to Remington, she was ruthless in her determination to raise the (for her) large sum which he had suggested.

Although George Glaize was the first name that came to her mind, for George was now doing very well, and was on the board of directors of his firm, she felt it was more than unlikely that he could conveniently let her have the sum she had in her mind. Richard Somervell she passed over without consideration; not even attempting to analyse the delicacy of their relationship, she felt that to introduce the question of money into their friendship would be indelicate, and bring in an uncomfortable element—at least on her side—that might prejudice their future meetings. One by one she dismissed the rich women with several of whom, although many of them had ceased to be patients, she was still on casually friendly terms: although she lingered over the name of Lois Thesiger, who was always interested in a business deal. Lois, however, was entirely absorbed in her forthcoming marriage with Solness, and, when she became her ladyship, was unlikely to concern herself with small-scale gambles. (Although, of course, it was not a gamble; Remington had explained that very carefully. It was as good as a gilt-edged security; and he had assured her that she would be able to repay the loan, with interest, within three years at the outside.)

The name of Flora had come to her in a flash of inspiration. For her own imponderable reasons, Flora, who had no liking for her own sex, had taken a fancy to Rose. It was, to begin with, the grudging respect of a woman who has done well out of vice for one who was making virtue pay. It had increased so far as to make Rose feel that she might succeed in cashing in on her popularity. She had, at least, not the faintest embarrassment in going to Flora, whose refusal, if she chose to refuse, would be as blunt as her acceptance of the terms Rose had to offer.

Flora was rubbing her nose contemplatively—as well she might; Rose had come plump out with the sum she required—the kind of sum that might appeal to the gambler in Flora.

"Well, dear, I don't know. Poor How-much used to look after my business; now he's gone, I've a notion I'm in a bit of mess. I tell you what I'll do. I'll have a talk to the duke. He's such a nice boy, and I've heard he's sound on money matters. Why don't you have a go at him yourself? I tell you, he's taken a real fancy to you; and you'll be making a mistake, if you don't get what you can while the mood lasts."

She turned on Rose a look, a cold, summarising, calculating look, which dismissed the whole of their friendship and valued her only according to Flora's currency. She said meaningly:

"You've not got so long before you—a woman of your age. What do you want to be a fool for? Why don't you get going, while the going's good?"

"Look, Flora." Rose spoke with deliberation. "I want this thing more than I wanted anything in my life; but I'm not prepared to sleep with anybody to get it. One doesn't start that sort of thing at my time of life, and, besides, there are circumstances—that you know nothing about—that would make it out of the question. So let's wash that out.

"If you like to talk to the duke, and he likes me well enough to consider the idea as a speculation, all well and good. I'll pay five per cent interest—which is as much as he'll get from the best of his investments at present—and I'll sign a paper to pay it back in three years. I'll give you a rake-off for the introduction. But if you try any games on the side, or give him the impression he's likely to get anything over and above his five per cent—the deal's off. And—this is the truth; it'll be your loss, as well as his."

"I could do with a pony," blinked Flora.

"It'll be more than a pony," promised Rose, "if you put me in the way of what I need."

The telephone trilled in Lady Emily Hope's sitting-room. She put out her hand and lifted the receiver.

"You, Dick? I thought you'd cut me off your list!"

His voice sounded short and dry—unlike Richard's voice, as she knew it; and her feminine intuition stirred. So Dick was in trouble again? What was it this time?

"Don't be ridiculous. Look here: will you come with me to *The Beggar's Opera*, next Monday?"

"But I've seen it."

"Of course, so has everybody."

"Haven't you? I thought——"

"My God, yes, of course I have. Anyhow, are you free that evening?"

"Just let me look. I'm afraid I'm not, Dick. I seem to have some people dining here. How about joining us? I think they're all people you like, and I'm sure to be able to find an extra woman."

"I . . . think I won't, thank you, Emily." At least he took the trouble, she thought, to say it nicely.

"How many seats have you got? It's a pity they are to be wasted."

"Oh, I expect they'll be glad enough to have them back; the public's still fighting to get in."

"I'm sorry your party has let you down," she hazarded gently. There was silence at the other end of the wire. "What are you doing? Why don't you come along and have a drink? Or have you got to change and go out somewhere?"

"No, I'm dining at the club. Are you alone?" he asked cautiously.

"Yes, until eight. Do come round; it seems a year since you came to see me."

It was only a few minutes before he was sitting by her fire. It was one of the pleasant things about Emily, that she always had a fire, somewhere, even in the height of summer; she excused it by saying that the house was on the "cold" side of the street. It needed no excuse in the English climate, and on an evening which, although the month was August, the dank chill was that of February; the streets were coated with cold slime, and a thin rain was falling.

The firelight spread warm, pink fans in the polished surfaces of the furniture; under the light of her shaded lamp, Lady Emily's head was bent over her needlework. She was one of the few women he knew who still did needlework; naturally she would. A peaceful person, the soothing occupation belonged to her character.

"Are you sure you won't have dinner with us on the 8th?" she was asking.

"You're a forgiving woman, Emily!" He smiled at her. "I believe I will—if it won't put your table out? As a matter of fact, when I rang you up, I was in a devilish bad temper."

"I thought you were," she said placidly.

"Well, I'd gone to a confounded lot of trouble to get the seats—I'd practically had to bribe them out of the agency—and I was naturally annoyed when—my guests let me down."

"People are very thoughtless about that kind of thing." She raised her head to send him her sympathy.

It was charming to be with Emily; she had a look of breeding which women seemed to have lost since the war. Everything about her was gentle: the lines of her lips and brows, the way her greying hair folded itself behind her ears. Why did they all dye their hair nowadays? Grey hair made a woman look younger; it took the harshness out of contours which had lost their purity of youth, it was soft and feminine and delicate—even in war-time, with uniform. Thank heaven, Emily was now out of uniform! He lay there, sleepily appraising the pleasant picture she made, in her gown of pale petunia-coloured stuff, its narrow pleats clinging to and defining the long, graceful line from hip to ankle.

"May one ask who your party was?"

"As a matter of fact"—he was annoyed with himself for hesitating, for having seemed to make a mystery of it—"it was the Timson children and their mother."

"Oh!" The instant withdrawal of her tone made him look up sharply.

"And what may 'Oh' stand for?"

"My dear Dick!" She smiled a little. "You haven't got to the point of expecting me to analyse my monosyllables, have you?"

"You don't like Rose Timson, do you?"

She drew a thread to its full length, slowly, before replying.

"How could I possibly 'like' her, or not? We hardly exchange a dozen words while she's giving me my massage."

"Pooh! Evasion," he mocked her.

"I think she's an extraordinary capable woman; the way she deals with my headaches—well, it's almost genius!"

"And you can't stand the sight of her," Richard finished for her.

"Really, Dick! What an exaggeration!" She frowned a

little, as though his persistence displeased her. "If I felt as you say, can you really suppose I would have her near me?"

"All the same, you don't like her," he insisted.

"I have never arrived at the point either of liking or disliking her." She could be as insistent as he.

"What a fish-like creature you make yourself out to be!"

She lowered her hands to her knee, and looked at him steadily.

"I have so often felt that we waste a lot of time in bestowing likes and dislikes upon persons for whom it is quite impossible for us to have any positive feelings at all. A sort of general—frittering of our emotions."

"But, good heavens, Emily! One does it without thinking. There are people to whom one is inevitably drawn, and others who make one close up—just at the sight of them," protested Richard.

"I must confess I try to control my—isn't the new word 'reactions'?—of that kind." She had resumed her stitching. "I think it's just a kind of instinct: to reserve one's feelings for the people who matter. And partly, of course, that one gets into such *messes*"—she grimaced at the word—"if one goes about, either caring or disliking, all the time."

"Well, you're a remarkable person." He said it ironically. "So Rose doesn't matter?"

"Why should she?" She said it in all innocence, raising her head as though in surprise. "I'm quite sure I don't matter to her!"

"You're wrong there. You're a sort of heroine to Rose."

"Now *you're* being ridiculous!"

"No, I'm not," he answered quite gravely. "I don't suppose she would put it into these words; but you're the ideal she has before her when she tries to educate the children."

"Really, I think this is rather absurd." Again he felt the quiver of her withdrawal.

"Not at all. It only proves that Rose knows quality when she sees it, even if she can't realise it in herself."

"Well! I appreciate the compliment. Why are you telling me all this about Mrs. Timson?" she interrupted herself to ask.

"I thought it might make you feel a bit more—friendly towards her."

"But, my dear Dick, I'm not *unfriendly*! It's just, perhaps, that I find her a little—unsympathetic; I don't mean in the narrow sense of kindness; no one could be kinder. Oh, you must know what I mean!" She allowed her tone to be tinged with impatience. "A lack of mutual interests——"

"Don't you think it's odd she should have a daughter like Kay?"

The rhythmic movement of her hand which held the needle ceased, he felt suspension—almost in her breathing.

"I don't think one is ever prepared for the tricks of heredity," Lady Emily said briskly. "Probably there is some relative on the father's side who would explain the anomaly."

"You've found the word: anomaly," he repeated slowly. There was a silence, during which he sent an accomplished series of smokerings spinning slowly towards the chimney. "As a matter of fact—Rose is an extremely worthy woman."

"I hope I haven't said anything to suggest that I didn't think she was that!"

Richard laughed.

"Not a word, my dear Emily. Of course, it's impossible to imagine that you and Rose would get on—let alone understand each other. You're products of totally different civilisations; you barely speak the same language; the idea of your having one idea in common is practically inconceivable."

"We had my headaches in common; she really does cure them," said Lady Emily, scrupulously fair.

"What a pity you had no children of your own, Emily. You would have made an admirable mother."

"Yes"—she took this calmly. "I should have liked sons."

"Not daughters?" he teased her.

"Of course; but I think they would have been more Philip's children than mine. Girls usually gravitate towards the father, don't they?"

"I was only thinking . . . it's a pity you aren't Kay's mother, instead of her own."

In the firelight he could not be sure of the flush that ran up her cheek. She laid down her needlework, rose abruptly and went to the cabinet in which the cocktail tray was standing.

"Let me make you another drink? Was the last one all

right? I meant to write it down, but it slipped my memory. You know where I got it? That charming little restaurant just beyond Ciboure; you know the one I mean—where the Arandas used to go so much. I've often wondered if one could stay there. It's so difficult, isn't it, to find anything really good on that stretch of the French coast."

He had risen, and joined her at the other side of the room.

"Why are you trying to head me off my subject, Emily?"

She was silent, while the liquor gurgled into the glass. She could feel him, standing over her, with his feet a little apart; he did not move, or thank her, when she gave him his drink; he remained still, a little menacing, looking down at her.

"Do you wish me to say?"

"Precisely; I am asking you."

She passed him, returning to her chair by the fire; not, this time, picking up her embroidery, but linking her hands quietly on her knee.

"Dick. You will forgive me if I seem impertinent. But—are you seeing rather a lot of the little Timson girls just now?"

"Otherwise—of Kay?" He would not spare her.

"If you wish it—of Kay."

He resumed his own seat, placed the cocktail carefully on the small pie-crust table at his side, took out his handkerchief and wiped off a trace of moisture the glass had left on his fingers.

"If any one but you had made that observation, Emily"—he took pains to keep his voice level—"I would have been very angry. I will answer you categorically. I have seen the children—both of them together—five times during their summer holidays. Last Sunday should have been the sixth, but for some reason Rose sent them out, and I had tea with her alone."

"Did you find that amusing?" Her tone was very cool.

"Frankly, no."

"Why not?" came, almost in a whisper, from Emily's chair.

"Good lord, Emily, what have Rose and I got to talk about? I've known her, you will recollect, for a number of years; I like her a great deal, and have the greatest respect in the world for her. We get on excellently when we are discussing serious subjects—on which she flatters me by asking my advice. Not

that she ever takes it! You might as well make an impression on granite, as on Rose; I actually believe she is the most obstinate, opinionated woman I ever met."

"Odd of you," she murmured. "I did not imagine you would care for that type."

"Oh, I'm quite willing to admit my liking for Rose is a *béguin*! She braces one; there is something rather refreshing, in these days, about meeting any one so straight up and down; so completely without subtleties, or the power of recognising them in other people. You've got to have a certain stamina, to stand up to Rose! She's like a climate, that either suits you or doesn't. And, unfortunately, she doesn't suit Kay."

"But, surely, Mrs Timson is very fond of her children?"

"Fond?" He laughed shortly. "She'd cheat, lie, steal—commit murder for them. And, of course, they're fond of her."

"I think it is a very great mistake to interfere between parents and their children," said Lady Emily carefully. "In fact, very wrong and quite unjustifiable—unless, of course, the question of cruelty is involved."

"Exactly. And there can be different kinds of cruelty," he told her. "The unconscious sort being, I think, quite as bad as the deliberate kind."

"Oh . . . well. It's hardly possible, is it, for an outsider to judge? One often finds that people who are outwardly on bad terms really understand each other very well." She made a small, restless movement, which he ignored.

"Yes, I think that probably goes for adults; but when there's a child in the question, the scales are apt to be weighted too heavily on the adult side. It has practically come to this: that Rose—with the best of intentions, of course—is trying to strangle Kay, mentally, and Kay is fighting for her life."

"Is that, perhaps, rather an exaggerated way of putting it?" He felt her coldness and her distaste. "Dick, I wonder if you would excuse my discussing the little Timson girl with you? I don't see that the discussion can be very profitable, since you can hardly expect me to intervene in a matter which is no business of mine. And—forgive me—I feel you have got the whole matter too much on your mind. Supposing we change the subject."

"By God!" He stared at her, as though seeing her for the

first time. "So you and Rose Timson have something in common—besides your headaches—after all!"

"I really don't understand," she said proudly.

"You, who've never known anything but freedom—haven't you got any sympathy for something that is struggling like a bird in a cage? Don't you care about trying to let it go free, before it's broken itself to pieces on the wires?"

He saw that he had shocked her. He had not meant to be so violent, but that she, upon whom he had counted for sympathy, should stand deliberately remote from his appeal, robbed him of his self-control.

"So it's true," she said, almost inaudibly.

"So what's true?" he disgraced himself by shouting at her.

"What I suspected—feared—on the day you brought them to lunch."

Careful! his instinct whispered to him. This is dangerous; for Kay's sake it must be treated lightly.

"You were rather a cat, that day, Emily. You made poor Kay quite shy!"

"So you *are* in love with——! Why do you come here, telling me these things, claiming my sympathy, when you must know I have none to give?"

"What's that got to do with it? Whether or not I am in love is my own business; I'm not claiming your sympathy for that. I came to ask your advice, as to how to make Rose Timson realise that she must leave Kay another year at school, and let her matriculate, if she wants to. That's the kind of thing Kay talks to me about—those are our lovers' affirmations! There's transport, there's guilty passion—there's *l'amour* for you, in the terms of a little girl of fifteen!" In his fury, he did not care what he said to her; he took a savage satisfaction in seering her flinch.

"Oh—the poor little thing!"

He laughed dryly, cruelly.

"Thanks. So you're beginning to——"

"I'm not 'beginning to' anything!" she flashed at him. "I know nothing about the school—I would not have the slightest idea of how to approach Mrs. Timson, to persuade her to change her plans for her daughter. I should feel guilty of the grossest impertinence if I attempted to do anything of the

kind! But I'm so sorry for the child, Dick—for having a man like you in love with her!"

"I really . . . Well, Emily, after that there's nothing more to be said." He tried to cover his discomfiture with a sneer, as he rose from his chair.

She faced him.

"You're good-looking, you're charming, you've got a delightful mind, you're—oh, *damnably* kind! She's bound to fall in love with you, and what can you do about it? Oh, Dick, you shouldn't have done it. You can't even promise to marry her in a few years' time."

"I see I oughtn't to have upset you, Emily." The earnestness of her look, of her grief, had melted his anger. "I should have known the whole thing was too difficult to explain."

"Or to excuse?"

"I say nothing about excuses. I don't admit that the situation calls for any. And if you imagine I am not fully, and most painfully, aware of the gravity and responsibility of my own position, Emily, you do me an injustice. Now, don't mull all this over in your mind; it is bound to arrange itself, so long as no well-meaning person tries to interfere. I may even go away for a while——"

"Indeed, it is the best thing you could do," she answered gravely.

"It's not quite so simple as that, all the same," he told her. "I suppose it's no use my telling you—you wouldn't understand—what a lonely person Kay is. And, unfortunately, she has come to depend on me."

"It should never have been allowed to come to that," was the austere reply. Richard smiled faintly.

"How wise we'd all be, wouldn't we, Emily, if we could see the future?"

CHAPTER SIX

"MUMMY, it's Susan's birthday just after we go back. Can I get her a present?"

Rose nodded absently over her accounts.

"Let's see; what's likely to be useful for her? I'll tell you what; I saw a very good angora cardigan in Jaeger's, when I was getting your pullovers. What about that?"

Kay gave an agonised twist of the hip.

"But I *would* like to buy it myself."

"All right. What have you got in the Post Office? You can let me have a couple of pounds, and I'll make it up if it's any more."

"I mean, go to the shops and choose something myself."

"Then you'll have to wait until Monday; I haven't got time for pottering round the shops this week," said Rose shortly. "What's the matter with the cardigan? I'm sure she'd like it as much as anything; it's a beautiful quality, and Susan's grey."

"Well . . . Jo's going to the dentist on Friday, isn't she? Mummy, couldn't Susan just drop me in Bond Street, and let me look at the shops while they're at Mr. Acland's?"

"Now, Kathleen." Rose turned round, firm and patient. "You know what my rules are. No walking round the West End alone until you're old enough to look after yourselves."

"But I *am*, Mummy! I'm fifteen, and Mrs. Lane lets Betty, though she's a year younger than me. Mummy, I won't go a single step out of Bond Street——"

Rose put her hands on her daughter's shoulders. Oh, dear—what a shadow the child was: all skin and bone. All the cream and eggs and patent foods seemed as if they burned away to nothing, inside this strange child of hers, with a sad, silent discontent smouldering perpetually behind her eyelids, a mute reproach that Rose felt she did not deserve. Could she not understand that her mother only wanted the best for her? She sometimes felt she would never know her own daughter; that she had no words or signs to penetrate Kay's reserve. She could only love her . . . and perhaps it was only, as Susan said,

growing pains. Annoyed by her own "softness," Rose shrugged away her misgivings; yet a deep maternal anxiety, an almost-painful tenderness filled her heart and deepened her voice, as she said:

"What a terrible colour you are, child. You've got to look better than that, if you're going back to school on Tuesday."

"Oh, Mummy, I'm perfectly all right!" Horror widened Kay's eyes for a moment, and her shoulders wriggled under her mother's hands.

Rose hesitated for a moment; then made up her mind.

"Well—I suppose you'll have to start some time. Mind now, if I let you do your shopping by yourself, you're not to hang about outside the windows. Go right in, look round, and if you don't see what you want, come straight out and go to the next place. And if anybody speaks to you—never mind if it's a man or a woman—you're to take no notice——"

"Oh, *Mummy!*" Kay's arms went ecstatically round her mother's neck. How easy to buy a child's affection—just by letting it do as it wanted! How easy—and how bad: for oneself, as well as the child.

"And mind you fix with Susan where you're to meet, and don't keep her waiting a minute, or I can't let you do it again."

It was almost as much for her own sake as for Kay's that Rose had given in. Common sense told her that little girls of Kathleen's age were already earning their living, going in tubes, buses, tramping the streets in their flimsy high-heeled shoes, and coming to no harm—unless they chose to. Evidently she could not keep the girl in leading strings for the rest of her life. It would be all right if she had Jo with her. . . . Oh, don't be an idiot! Rose told herself irritably. They can't go about like a pair of Siamese twins for ever. Yet . . . If it was Jo, I wouldn't turn a hair: that one's got her head screwed on the right way, although she's two years younger—It's high time I disciplined myself! thought Rose. She's got to learn, and it's a kind of last treat for the holidays.

The telephone trilled in Richard's office. His secretary lifted the receiver and held it to a languid ear. "One moment, please." She covered the mouthpiece with her hand.

"It's a Miss Timson."

"Hand it over." Thinking she had the name wrong, and that it must be Rose, Richard took the call.

"Hallo, Rose."

A hushed, very breathless voice informed him: "It's Kay."

"Good lord, child, what are you doing?" Her voice had sent a pang through him; something must surely be wrong, for Kay to telephone—a thing she had never done before.

"I'll be in Bond Street, on the corner by Pinet's, about eleven, or a little bit after. Could—could you be there?"

"Just a minute. What is there this morning? Anybody coming?"

His secretary shook her head, strangling the yawn of a long boredom, as she consulted the pad.

"Nothing until your manicure appointment at 12.30."

"See how we run the country!" he jeered. "I can make that, Kay. Eleven prompt. And listen: no waiting on corners. Meet me at Barbellion's—inside; we'll have some chocolate—or whatever you like for elevenses."

"Heavenly!" she breathed. "Good-bye."

Richard drew a breath of relief; it did not sound like anything serious. Were the children playing truant?—or had Rose let them off the leash, for some incalculable reason, to ramble round the West End?

He was already there, at the counter, arming himself with boxes of candies, when the door was swung open by the commissionaire and Kay came in. The folds of her thin frock, moulding themselves to her thighs, reminded him of a little Nike; there was urgency in the forward tilt of her body and the questing turn of her long, slim neck; something thrilling, suppressed, innocently clandestine about her poise, about her compressed lips that parted in a smile that lit up the whole of her when she saw him. Really, Kay! I've never seen anybody smile with her shoulders, with her wrists, with her feet and ankles, in that divinely shameless fashion!

"Where's Jo?" He looked across her head as she slid her gloved hand into his.

"She's having her teeth done. I'm by myself!"

Ha-ha, la belle jaune giroflé! Are we blowing trumpets? thought Richard. Or what? He had a self-conscious feeling that they were being looked at; he took her arm to steer her on into the tea-room, while she, breathless and unaware of

any one but the two of them, tilted back her head to answer his smile; he could see a vein throbbing in her long throat.

"Do you mean, you've—bolted?"

"Mother knows—I mean, about being by myself. I had to get Susan a birthday present, so I couldn't very well bring her with me, could I?—when it's meant to be a surprise!"

She looked older; the fashion of bobbing the hair had standardised women's ages until one had to look twice before deciding whether one's neighbour was forty or fourteen. Seated with her back to the wall, the light above casting the shadow of her hat-brim on her face, Kay might be seventeen, or eighteen; the age, in fact, for legitimately having an admirer who brought her to Barbellion's to drink chocolate at eleven. Richard gave an uneasy glance at other tables. He had been a fool to suggest Barbellion's; a thoughtless, selfish fool. How to protect Kay from the sly-eyed curiosity of the women who were likely to come in became his preoccupation, and stiffened their conversation; Kay herself being so excited that she had almost nothing to say. She kept looking at her wrist-watch, and, obviously, counting the minutes.

"What are you going to get Susan?"

"I don't know. It's time we were looking, isn't it?"

"Shall we try Smythson's? They have good leather things—or she might like some dashing notepaper, with an initial."

"I've only got two pounds to spend," said Kay gravely.

The morning was hot and bright, and the sun threw their long-legged shadows before them as they went into the street.

"Back to school—on Tuesday, isn't it?" (Hypocrite, pretending not to know!)

"Yes. Oh, Mr. Dick! Did you say anything to Mother?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

He knew he could not cloud her sunshine by a description of Rose's uncompromising reception of his attempt.

"I think we'll have to talk about it again, Kay. After all, she's got a year, hasn't she, to make up her mind?"

"Two terms; you have to give a term's notice—that's one of the rules."

"All right. I'll keep on working on her."

"I wish——" burst suddenly from Kay—"we could write to one another! Oh, dear. That's another rule. I'm sure to

have thousands of things to tell you: things it would be no use to tell Mummy——"

"Save them up for the holidays," counselled Richard. "We'll have an orgy of 'telling' when you come home for Christmas."

"But one forgets such a lot," she lamented.

It was one of Smythson's "blue" weeks; blocks of deckled paper, fans of envelopes coquetting with quills and sticks of mammoth sealing-wax, opposed the frivolity of the boudoir to the baronial majesty of gold-tooled tree-calf, and the pale, polished pigskin of country houses.

"Everything looks terribly expensive," whispered Kay.

"Oh, we'll find something"—frankly, Richard was not sanguine; cellar books, game records and sets of Burke, Bradshaw and Whitaker were not exactly in Susan's line. He had suggested Smythson's with the idea that it was a less equivocal place in which to be seen shopping with a little girl than Asprey's or the lingerie places. Confound the souls of one's friends to hell—for obliging one to take such precautions! Even Emily—he would positively have smirked at Emily, if she had walked in, to find him buying some such innocuous object as a fountain pen or a blotter, with Kay at his side. It would serve her right, for her misjudgment of him.

But he was amused by the decision and speed Kay brought to her choice. Rejecting the salesman's suggestions, she wandered off by herself, and presently, to Richard's amusement, came back with a large ivory paper-knife, with a dagger-shaped shagreen handle.

"That's just the thing."

"Very pretty. But are you sure Susan will like it?"

"Oh, yes." Her eyes smiled confidently into his. "It belongs to her powerful, fortress'd house."

"To *what*?"

"I'll tell you some other time"—she inclined her head towards the salesman, to whom Richard managed to convey, unseen, that the price of the paper-knife was exactly two pounds; a message which, as Richard was an old customer, registered. He managed to smuggle some notes across the counter, behind Kay's back, and they turned away, to wait for the parcel.

"Kay, I've had an idea. Do you keep a diary?"

"Yes, Mummy makes us."

"I don't mean that kind." He had seen the "engagement books" of Kay and Jo. "A real one, I mean. Putting down all one does and sees and hears each day."

"No, I haven't kept one of those." The idea evidently interested her. "Some of the girls start them in January, but they generally give up after a few months—or they lose them."

"If I get you a diary, will you keep it properly? Then you would not forget things, and you could either let me read it, or tell me the important things, when you come back to town."

"Oh, yes; that's a lovely idea!" Her eyes sparkled.

"Do you like that one?" He picked up a large, square volume, bound in limp leather. "Or do you prefer another colour?"

"No, I like this." (I like it because you chose it!) "A whole page for each day! But I'll never do enough things, at school, to fill this up!"

"Not only what you do, but what you think; books, bits of poetry—anything you want to remember." If she keeps it with any sort of fidelity, he was thinking, I shall have a complete record of Kay for the next three months!

"Do you think," said Kay shyly, "I might have two?"

"Certainly. But why two? I thought you were going to find it hard enough to fill one," he teased her.

"Well . . . I might lose one. No." She gave him a quick, shy glance, and hung her head. "I didn't mean that," she whispered.

"Tell me what you did mean, Kay," he said quietly.

"One gets so in the habit of saying what one doesn't mean! It's dreadful—it's lying; but what *has* one got to do, Mr. Dick? If you say the truth, people don't understand—or they ask you to explain—and *then* they don't understand——"

"I think I understand; usually, don't I?"

"That's what's so dreadful—you see, I do it, even to you. It just seems to pop out—the thing that isn't true." Her face was crimson with distress. "Promise me you'll never think I lie to you on purpose! Promise me——"

"Of course, I know you don't. Now, what *did* you mean—about the diary?"

"I'd like to have another one, please, for private things."

He loved her for revoking her evasion, but smothered a smile at the snub which, unwittingly, she had given him. Dear—dearest Kay! So even I am not to be admitted into your "private" life!

"If you want to keep a *private* diary"—with a teasing echo of her own emphasis on the word—"it had better be one of these." He picked up a smaller but thicker volume, that closed with a little gilt latch and key. "It's my duty to inform you that keeping a *private* diary is considered a pernicious occupation. People have got into prison, and been hanged, and all sorts of unpleasant things, for keeping private diaries. So don't say I haven't warned you."

"How thrilling, to have a book that locks up!"

"Well, they had better be done up with——"

"Please—just a minute." He saw she was confused. "Would—would you mind having them posted—from your home?"

Danger. He saw the red flash, as though it had actually taken place in front of his eyes.

He had assumed, of course, that Rose knew nothing of Kay's summons by telephone; that went without saying. If she found out about their meeting, it could easily have been a chance encounter; sharp as Rose was, she was hardly likely to suspect Kay of sending him a message. He had even debated the wisdom of telling Kay to mention, casually, that she had seen him, but knew he had no right to encourage the child in duplicity. Now, however, she revealed, not only her intention of deceiving Rose, but of making him her accomplice. Oh, Kay, why aren't you older, and all this would not matter? Or it would matter less. Loving me, you make a black-guard of me, and I am too weak-spirited to resist it.

"Will you?" she asked, pressing him.

"All right." He picked the books up roughly. "I'll get Jenkins to pack them. I suppose, after to-day"—he spoke deliberately—"it would not do for them to arrive with the Smythson label."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't!" She was earnest, without sense of guilt. To hell with you, Emily, thought Richard, as they came out of the shop.

"I've got to meet Jo and Susan at Walpole's," she told him.

And the boxes of sweets he was carrying; confound them,

what was he to do with them? Another present for his secretary, he supposed. The girl would begin to think he had designs on her.

"Well, I think it's a soft present," was Rose's opinion. "If Susan had a place of her own, I suppose she could have it lying about, as an ornament; but if you ask me, it's a sheer waste of money."

Still, the outing seemed to have done the child good. Perhaps she needed a bit more independence; it was a boxed-up life in a boarding school—goodness knew what Kathleen saw in it. Laura and I couldn't wait for our schooldays to be over! Very funny, how much older we were in some ways, and yet younger in others.

"Now what's this about?"

It was the following morning; the parcel post had arrived for once, before Rose went out—it would; Kay shivered. She would hardly look at the large, brown-paper packet which Rose was examining; she was one of the many who could never see an unfamiliar writing on a cover without indulging in a long conjecture upon the sender and the contents.

"It's addressed to you, Kathleen; do you know who it's from?"

"No. No," repeated Kay, with a desperate firmness. She was praying very hard for patience—only for patience—to bear with her mother's procrastination.

"You'd better have a look"—Rose handed it over grudgingly, as though she would have liked to open it herself, but was obliged by justice to concede it to its owner. With the parcel flat on the dining-table, Kay fumbled unhappily with the string.

"Here, child, don't waste time"—with a capable slash of her penknife, Rose cut and dragged the string away. "Hurry up—I should be gone by now."

Why aren't you gone? thought Kay bitterly, as, with Jo breathing excitement at her elbow, she turned back the paper. The two diaries were there, with a smaller book on top of them, a thick, small volume in a rubbed calf binding. On the top, fatally exposed, lay a single sheet of Richard's notepaper. She read its contents at a glance:

"Dear Kay,

"As it seems unlikely we shall meet before Tuesday, here is a going-back present; two diaries, use which you like. I am also sending you my Pepys, who isn't a bad model for the aspirant diarist. Love to you and Jo.

"R. M. S."

"It's from Mr. Dick," she muttered.

"What?" Rose put out her hand quickly. While she was reading the note, Kay took the opportunity of opening the Pepys. On the flyleaf, the name "Richard Morton Somervell" was crossed out; beneath it, in the brightness of fresh ink, was the inscription, "For K.T., from R.M.S."

"H'm." As Rose picked up the diaries, something tinkled on the floor. "What's that?"

"Only—the key." Kay bent quickly, and slipped it in the pocket of her jersey.

"Key? It's a queer idea, having a book that locks up, if you ask me." She raised the book towards her eyes; recently Rose had been forced to realise she needed glasses. Her thumb ruffled the stiff, gilt-edged paper, came to the marbled fly-leaves: to a minute label, lettered in gold. "Smythson! I suppose you didn't meet Mr. Somervell at Smythson's yesterday?"

"No, Mummy." The lie was out before Kay had time to consider it. Instantly she regretted it; it would have been so easy to say she and Mr. Dick had met—accidentally.

"I hope you're telling me the truth, Kathleen."

"Yes, Mummy." When one lied, it was terrible, how one had to go on lying.

"Well." Rose tossed the books back on the table. "If that's how you want to waste your time, I suppose it's your business. I don't know what you'll fill it up with—a pack of nonsense, I expect."

She kissed Kay quickly and briskly, looked at her watch, and hurried to the door.

Her fountain pen was filled. She had locked herself in the bathroom—the only room in the house where one could be private. Sitting on the cork bath-stool, she opened the book on her knees, verified the date, and began her first entry.

"I saw him for the last time yesterday, and he gave me this. I shan't see him again for three months—terrible. It was marvellous—the first time we've ever been alone together. He called me Darling just at the end . . ."

"Are you in there, Kathleen?"

"Yes—I won't be a minute."

Just a minute—only a minute—until I've finished this page . . .

An understood thing, on the afternoon before they went back to school, was the visit to George. George's shop did not close until six, but on the day the girls came to tea he left at five o'clock. As the taxi turned into the road, they generally saw George striding along, with his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, if it was cold weather, or swinging rather awkwardly by his sides if it was warm, and he only had his suit on. Jo hung out of the window, shrieked, "Hallo, George!" and Susan made her sit down and behave until they arrived at the gate of "Kosy Kot," where the girls got out, and Susan went back in the taxi to Plymouth Street. Coming back, they rode on the top of a bus with George; that was much better fun than the taxi, especially on winter evenings, when lamps were lit, and one could see in through all the windows along the Brixton and Kennington roads.

Jo raced back down the road to meet George, flinging herself into his arms and bestowing on him large, smacking kisses which were audible even from the gate of "Kosy Kot."

"Well, Katie!"

She did not like being called Katie, which was George's invention—one of the rather pathetic, blustering inventions, if she had but known, to cover the fact that he was rather shy of Rose's elder girl. It was part of the pathos of George that, while he was perfectly at home, romping and fooling with Jo, Kay made him shy; he had to put on a false heartiness, and crack silly jokes, to give himself confidence in the face of Kay's quiet aloofness. He told himself that it was because she was growing up—becoming quite a young lady; but, privately, he rather agreed with Rose that Kay had been spoiled by school. She would get over it, later on: and meanwhile, one must not show more favour to Jo than to Katie. He

could, at least, show her his books—the rather old-fashioned books of biography and travel that he collected second-hand, and whose published price, eighteen shillings or a guinea, impressed him with the worth of the contents. It did not strike George, in his innocence, to wonder why these books had found their way into the marked-down boxes of publishers' remainders within a year or two of their publication.

"There's a book for you to read some day, Katie! Look at the condition: not even a mark anywhere, plates all complete—and some of the pages haven't even been cut. Look at it: published at eighteen shillings. And what do you think I paid for it? Three bob!"

He read very gravely, missing no sentence, and pausing frequently, to digest what he read. Reading, to George, was a rite, rather than a pleasure; it was education—and every man's duty is to educate himself. He had never opened a modern novel in his life, but his mind was surprisingly stored with geographical platitudes, with small, pointless anecdotes and with the trivia of second-rate authors, whom his perception did not allow him to differentiate from the classics, which he sometimes picked up, "for a change."

"Well, Katie." He bent, as was his custom, to kiss her. Kay was almost as taken aback as he, to find herself dodging aside; the action was unpremeditated. It had come to her, in a flash, that she could not endure George's large, flat lips, almost indistinguishable in colour from the general ruddiness of his face, against her own cheek. There was an uncomfortable pause, while he straightened himself, and Kay, for the first time in her life, had the shock of seeing a man blush. The deep, painful purple—like stewed raspberries, she found herself thinking—mounted to his blinking eyes.

"Kay!" Jo's shocked exclamation shocked her to her senses.

"I'm sorry, Katie . . ."

"I'm sorry—it's only—I think I'm getting too old—perhaps—to be kissed," she stammered.

"I'm not, George—I'm not!" Jo flung herself into another distracted embrace; her tender heart could not support the idea of George's being hurt by Kay's unkind behaviour.

"That's all right, Katie. Not yet awhile, eh, Jo? Not yet!"

George had recovered himself; he swung open the gate, with an upward glance at the house which, in spite of Rose's

strictures, stood to George for his emblem of success in his career. It was grand to have been able to bring Ma to a place like this, to finish her days!

"Here we are—and welcome to the old baronial hall!"

"I do *love* your house, George!" Jo swung rapturously on his arm. "It's so different from all other houses——"

Kay followed them miserably. I've been beastly to George, but I couldn't help it. If any man kisses me now, it's got to be Dick. I'll never kiss anybody else in my life. I don't care about his wife. She must have left him, anyhow, for he never mentions her, and she doesn't live at the flat. I know, because I've been all over it. I belong to Dick; and perhaps when I'm grown-up, he'll get a divorce and we'll get married. If only he would ask me to marry him! "You won't mind waiting, will you, darling?" Of course I won't! I'll wait—for ever.

The parlour was stuffy, and smelt of old Mrs. Glaize and a very unpleasant, mangy fox-terrier with revolting habits. None of this seemed to worry George, however, who went to the kitchen to tell "the girl" to bring tea. Jo, who was the least fastidious child in the world, promptly went to sit on Mrs. Glaize's knee and be fussed over, while Kay crouched as near as she could to the tightly closed window (which was further blocked by a collection of wilting ferns), and wondered how she would survive this penance forced on her by her mother's friendship with George: a penance with which, to Kay's surprise, Rose sympathised. "But we can't hurt George's feelings, dearie, he thinks the earth of you and Jo."

When, at last, tea was over, she remembered a well-known subterfuge of her mother's for escaping from the company—and odour—of Mrs. Glaize.

"Can we see the garden? Will you show us what you've been planting since we went away?" She knew this was a safe gambit, and would please George.

"I've got something besides plants to show you!" He looked shyly proud, pulled down his waistcoat, shooting the crumbs that had gathered in its folds on to the carpet, and winked at Jo, who let out a shriek as she stepped through the window that led to the garden at the back of the house.

"A swing! Oh, George, why've you got a swing?"

"I got it for you youngsters. It was wet last time you came down, so I didn't show it to you. There's something, I said,

for the summer evenings—a bit of a change from rounders, and that sort of stuff, on the grass. I got something else too." He turned to Kay with a look of humbleness and uncertainty which, she could not tell why, made her feel ashamed. "I don't know if you'll like it, Katie—but I got a set of clock golf too. It seemed the right sort of game for young ladies. You know, 'Kosy Kor's' as much your home as Plymouth Street, and now I've fixed you up a bit of entertainment, you'll be able to come down here and get the fresh air, and we'll see a bit more of you."

She felt an agony in her throat, and turned her head quickly towards Jo, racing to the swing.

"Wait for me, Jo!"

Oh, swing, carry me away from it all: George's kindness and the way he looked when I wouldn't kiss him—and Mrs. Glaize—and that nasty little dog—and this awful house! Carry me where people sit on terraces in the sunlight, and drink wine, and everything one sees and smells and hears has a sort of beauty of its own.

The swing swooped through the air, propelled by the bend and thrust of their knees. "Go on—higher, Kay!" screamed Jo. She laughed, and urged it forward. Straightening, she flung her breast against the current of the air, her short hair flew out like a flag. Fiercely she curseyed and thrust again, possessed by the sheer thrill of movement—of the gravity which dragged her down from the heights and flung her upwards again: no longer a tormented, amorous schoolgirl, but an excited, thoughtless child. George, filling his pipe, smiled contentedly at their enjoyment. What a pity Rose was not here to share the fun! It was more of this kind of thing they wanted—not walking in the parks.

That night she wrote in her diary—the one Richard was to read:

"We went to George's, and swung in the new swing. What a foolish occupation for a person of my age!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

ROSE TIMSON thought, I can't be such a fool as to be crying. Cautiously she felt for her bandbag, opened it, drew out the handkerchief which liberated its clean, sharp scent of lavender into an air clogged with other women's perfumes, dabbed furtively at the corner of her eye and lowered her hand quickly. The mist formed again, and she blinked it fiercely away, glancing sidelong, to see if anybody noticed. Rows of bodies, amorphous in darkness, with here and there the flash of a jewel or a man's white shirt bringing some form into the dark mass; and rows of pinkish faces taking their illumination from the stage—pleasant, non-critical, slightly fatuous: the Speech-Day faces of parents, worn like polite masks over a variety of emotions. Impossible to tell what havoc of pride, jealousy, mortification was wrought under *décolleté* bosoms, and behind porcelain masculine frontals; "Towers" parents were, in whatever circumstances, well-bred. Her hand hot and tight inside the kid glove, clutching her handkerchief, Rose found herself cursing them for their breeding. What right had they to sit there, like mummies, unmoved, while she burned and was agonised?

I'm the only one crying. What fools they are, not *all* to be crying! Can't they see how touching she is? My Katie. Who would ever have believed she had it in her? Why, she's beautiful—*my Katie*! It's not the dress, either; it's something in the child herself—the way she looks, the way she moves: as if she was moving in another world.

That's my very own child. Mine and Harry's. Yes, you must have your due, Harry; she didn't get that from Lambtons. What a fool you are, Harry! If only you'd behaved yourself, we might be sitting here together, sharing our pride. You would understand this better than I, because of your books I used to make fun of, and the way you went on about Shakespeare—especially when you were a bit drunk. This is *you*, Harry: what you might have been if you'd only conquered your selfishness and your lust and used the good instead of the bad in you. Think what you could have given her. . . .

Yes, you'd have understood all this, and I bet you'd have been crying too. You'd have taken all the credit, I suppose? Well, here's what you threw away, when you let us down.

Who taught her to use her voice like that? It's enough to break your heart. Don't, Katie—don't, dearie: I can't bear it. Why, Katie, don't you know mother loves you? I'd do anything to make you happy, my darling—don't you know that? Sometimes I'm impatient, I haven't got enough imagination, perhaps—I'm not that sort of person. You see, a person who has lived my sort of life—almost a man's life, since we were left by ourselves—hasn't got much time for cultivating imagination, particularly if it isn't born in her. You see, Katie, I'm made of hard, workaday stuff that's useful and long lasting; but you're fine, like silk. You've got a stupid old mother, but she understands that much! And some day, perhaps, when we're all safe and settled, I'll have time to be wiser. I'll teach myself to appreciate the things you enjoy, and it will be your turn to get mad with me. You know, Katie, when I've lost my temper, it's not been with you, so much as with myself. I've felt I ought to know you better. . . . Well, now I do. Just fancy; it's taken this play (what's it called? Oh, bother, now I can't find my glasses) to show me my own girl. . . . Why, darling, you're beautiful . . . you're beautiful. . . .

"Well, Mrs. Timson, you must be very proud!"

"You're 'Prunella's' mother, aren't you? The child's quite lovely."

"It's the best show they've ever done at The Towers; but of course they've never had a Kay Timson before!"

"Who *is* that child? Extraordinary, don't you think, the way they teach them to act nowadays."

"Moving"—"Exquisite"—"Such a touching performance"—

She stood glowing, a little dazed, feeling her face was red, needed powdering, receiving the congratulations of strangers, gorged with them, yet avid for more; not too confused, either, to notice the averted heads of the envious few, who resenting the eclipse of their own offspring, somewhat ostentatiously held themselves aloof from the chorus of praise. One high-pitched and disgruntled voice raised itself above the rest:

"Of course, I don't call it *acting*. It's so easy for a girl of that age to think herself into a part like Prunella——"

A broad grin spread itself over Rose's face; it only needed this—jealousy—to complete the tribute.

Jo, in the tinsel and tatters of her part, had forced her way through the crowd to fling her arms about her mother's waist.

"Mummy! Wasn't it lovely? Wasn't Kay good? Mummy, come up to the bedroom and help me get my make-up off Mummy, where's Mr. Dick?"

"Gently, dearie—you're pushing people"—but her own laughter was almost hysterical. It's all been too much—my hair's untidy—my face is shining—I've dropped a glove—I'm as excited as the children—

"Where's Mr. Dick, Mummy?" Jo was insisting.

"He couldn't come—he got a call-up from his ministry at the last minute—Jo, for pity's sake, you're dragging my sleeve off. Jo! Stand still, you little torment! Where's Kay?"

"Upstairs—do come along, Mummy. Oh, crumbs! Here's Miss Banks. Now I'll get in a row," said Jo resignedly.

"Mrs. Timson!" Was every one excited to-night? The girl's face—she hardly looked to be more than twenty—shone into Rose's; something kindled between them. "Oh, Mrs. Timson: I'm so glad you're here. We'd all have been so disappointed if you hadn't seen Kay!"

Rose was disconcerted to find herself blinded by a sudden gush of tears; there was nothing for it but to grope for her handkerchief. While she performed this humiliating necessity, the young mistress tactfully turned her attention to Jo, trying unsuccessfully to evade notice behind her mother's back.

"Jo, you know you're not allowed to come down and talk to people until you've changed. Up you go, at once. I'll bring your mother upstairs in a moment." As Jo fled up the staircase, she added gently, "I know how you feel, Mrs. Timson. She made me cry—even at rehearsals."

"Silly nonsense." Rose blew her nose vigorously. "It's a gloomy sort of ending, isn't it?" she ventured, in extenuation of her own weakness. The girl smiled; some gust of sympathy and understanding blew her towards this woman, so different from the majority of the "Towers" parents.

"I can't think what we'll do without Kay next year"

Rose paused, gripping her nose between finger and thumb; her blue eyes stared fixedly over the top of the handkerchief.

"Next year? . . . Well . . . there's no knowing what may happen—next year."

The Spring term dragged itself on its snail-like course, brightened only, for Kay, but her mother's unexpected decision to allow her to stay on until the end of the year, instead of leaving at midsummer, and to take School Certificate. It was not the hoped-for extra year, but, in her relief, an added twelve weeks seemed to Kay like eternity. Working for "School Certif." brought a stimulus into the languid tempo of the term—notoriously the drabdest, the most tantalising of the school year: its first half shrouded in the miseries of winter, its second half rendered all but unendurable by sweet, impatient intimations of Spring, by restlessness felt in the blood, for which the routine of the schoolroom makes no provision.

The summer term passed quickly—the term which was to end in a miracle for Kay. She came home with a little more colour in her face, a little heavier, with an excellent report and a letter from the headmistress to Rose, saying that, thanks to the good standard of work Kay had maintained since coming to The Towers, and to her steady progress during the last twelve months, her success in the School Certificate was to be taken for granted provided she did not overwork, and "was not allowed to over-do things in the holidays": at which Rose snorted, and observed ironically to Susan that parents would soon be expected to consult the schools on what they were allowed to do with their children when they got them home at the end of the term.

Secretly, she was proud of Kay's report, with its succession of "Very goods" and "Excellents" (in notable contrast to Jo's, which showed its invariable mediocrity, varied by an occasional "Very weak in this subject"—a matter of indifference to Jo, who had a medal for swimming and the highest batting average of her house: these much more important than a dull, scholastic proficiency); and she was happy to see the child looking so well and contented, with more animation and what Rose called "liveliness" than she had shown a year ago.

"And what's the play going to be next term?" For once there was something that Rose could discuss with knowledge

and confidence; she smiled, as she served Kay with her second helping of a favourite sweet.

"They're talking about *Land of Heart's Desire*"—the answer came almost indifferently. "There aren't so many people, and you see, all the school certifs. will be out of it."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, we couldn't be in the play and take the exam., could we?" asked Kay innocently.

"What do you mean? Aren't they putting you in it?"

"Me? Why, no, Mummy!" she laughed. "I'm doing the Certif.—aren't I?"

"Well . . . I don't know!" The meaningless exclamation was left to express the bitter depths of Rose's disappointment. She who had possessed her soul in patience, for the sake of the renewal of her pride in Kay's fresh achievement, felt like a child cheated of a promised treat. There was a pause, before she made what, for her, amounted to an appeal.

"But wouldn't you sooner be in the play, than take the exam.?"

Kay knitted her soft brows, puzzled and a little uneasy at the hurt note in Rose's voice.

"But there couldn't be any question of it now," she answered slowly. "And if I was in the play, I could only have a tiny little bit to do, because we aren't allowed to have the leading part two years running. No, I'd rather not be in the play this time; it would be awfully dull, after *Prunella*."

With which Rose had to be content, although feeling in her heart that she had been deceived: that Kay had won her extra term through misrepresentation—although not the child's own; had not that teacher said, at the last speech day, "We don't know what we will do without Kay next year"?

They were leaving for Frinton in a week's time, and the days which followed were filled with a frenzy of packing, of laundering and mending sports clothes and buying new ones, of preparing the paraphernalia of a month at the seaside. Two nights before they were due to depart, Jo developed a rash on her chest.

Richard Somervell, walking into the cocktail bar of the restaurant where he was meeting a friend for lunch, was surprised to see his cousin Emily, also alone, at one of the small

tables. They greeted one another with the modified pleasure of persons who, although very fond of each other, have had a serious difference. He had actually not been to her house since that wet August evening, all but a year ago, although they had encountered several times in house parties, and during the social give-and-take of spring and summer. Emily was cool and perfect, as usual, in a dust-coloured chiffon, with a broad lime-green hat that threw its curious reflection on her transparent face.

"Dry Martinis," he told the waiter. "I take it your host is late, like mine, Emily. People have no sense of responsibility about time in these days."

"My time isn't very valuable," said Lady Emily easily. "I like getting to places early, and having a look round. You're looking rather tired, Dick."

"The wear and tear of having nothing to do." He took the chair beside her; there was rather a prickly pause.

"No word, yet, of Geneva?"

"Oh, I've turned that down. There's something in the air, now, about Washington. It'll probably fall down, like everything else."

"I hope it won't. I think you'd be better—if they gave you something—intelligent to do."

He smiled sourly.

"Think I'm going rotten; is that it, Emily?"

"It's bad for any one, to be without reasonable occupation for such a long time," she told him tranquilly.

"We're finding out a lot of things that are bad for us, since 1918! I'm supposed to be in an enviable position," was the cynical retort. "I'm pulling down a salary—which I don't need—for doing absolutely nothing every day from ten to four: while most of my ex-colleagues are tramping their feet off, fawning and lick-spittling to get jobs they would have thrown out of the window six years ago, and wondering where the hell to find the price of a hair-cut! That may sound an exaggeration," he concluded, "but it's pretty damn' near the truth in several cases I could mention. I tell you, the plight of my fellow men doesn't make me any more of a favourite with myself than I am with them, for what they are pleased to call my good fortune—undeserved, in brackets and underlined."

Again the silence fell between them. Richard drained his glass, and beckoned the waiter to fetch him another. On Lady Emily's the dew lay undisturbed. She said, suddenly and softly, as though she desired to show him that she was ready to make some amends:

"I'm sorry about the little Timson girl."

Richard felt his heart miss a beat.

"*What?*"

"Didn't you know? I thought you were bound to." Her surprise was so genuine that it carried no sting. "The little one—Jo—has got measles. Isn't it tiresome for them?"

"But they're going away, the day after to-morrow," he said, when he could speak.

"I felt sure you would have heard. Mrs. Timson rang me this morning—she was coming to give my head a rub; it's been a little troublesome again. She's had to cancel the hotel reservations and everything, for of course the elder girl may get it too. I feel so sorry for her—I'm sure any one who works as hard as Mrs. Timson needs her summer holiday."

"I'll have Kay sent down to Verney."

"*Dick.*" The small, frozen monosyllable showed her disapproval.

"The child can't swelter in town through the summer months, can she? Susan Clayborne can take her; nobody'll even notice they're there. Father never comes out of his room now, and Mother won't be disturbed in a place the size of ours. They can have a bedroom and a sitting-room, and be out of doors all day."

"You know your own business," she told him frigidly.

"May I remind you that I'm going to Scotland for the fishing?" he retorted, with an equal coldness. "I'm due to leave on Saturday, and I shall probably spend six weeks in the north. That should be enough—for Rose, as well as for you."

"You don't suggest she—knows?"

"How do I know what she knows? If her imagination is anything like yours, Emily, then God protect me from virtuous women! Rose and I have hardly met since Easter; I went in for half an hour to see the children when they came back from school." He saw with relief his luncheon companion looking towards him from the door, and rose. "Excuse me, my

man's here. I hope you don't have to wait long for your friend."

Why had Rose not let him know? He haggled over the question during lunch. Instead of returning to his office, he put through a call, learned that nothing of importance had come in, and walked back to South Audley Street. He flung himself into an armchair, determined to have things cut and dried before he rang up Rose. After a few minutes' conversation, he put in a call for Verney; better make sure it was settled that end, before making his suggestion, which he had no reason to think she would refuse. While he waited for the call to go through, his eyes fell on the square book of limp blue leather which lay at his elbow, and he smiled involuntarily as he recognised Kay's diary—the one of last year, which he had read and chuckled over many times. It was very good, but written, of course, for an audience. Occasionally one caught a glimpse of the real Kay flickering behind the careful, self-conscious phrases. Clever, for a child of that age, those occasional imitations of Pepys. He had renewed it, at her request, in January; the other, the "private" one, did not need renewal, it was a three-year diary.

"Mr. Richard Somervell speaking. Tell Mrs. Somervell I would like to speak to her . . ."

The other book; that was what he would give his eyes to see. The other book, written in the simple, slipshod fashion of the one or two of her letters which Rose had shown him, when first she went to The Towers: Kay being herself, not thinking about vocabulary, or style, or any of the tricks she had used to impress him in the diary she had so eagerly pushed into his hands at the end of the Christmas term.

His mother's faint, wavering voice came distantly on the line . . .

"Verney Court.

Wednesday.

"Darling Mummy,

One of the lovely things here is the wonderful collections. Old Mr. Somervell (whom I haven't seen) has got cases and cases of beautiful old silver and china, and Mrs. Somervell asked me into one of the drawing-rooms (*one*

of!!!) the other day to show me her miniatures. Hundreds of them. At least 50 or 60. Done on porcelain. One is only an eye; Mrs. Somervell says it belonged to one of her ancestresses who had it painted as a wedding present for her husband, who wore it in a ring. It is painted so beautifully that it seems to follow you—quite uncanny. There is a fine collection of paintings too. This is a very cultured house . . .”

Cultured: what a queer word for the child to use. But she was right. Somervells and Hopes were cultured people; even she—Rose—knew enough to recognise that. She found herself brooding on this mysterious quality which, on the few occasions she had encountered it, commanded always her uneasy respect; this quality which she had not—but suppose Kay had it? It would be hard and “funny” (Rose’s stand-by in epithets for anything that eluded her understanding) to have a cultured daughter; it saddened her, as if Kay had gone into another room where she could not follow. Yet why should she not follow—if only a little way?

During that year Rose had thought much about her elder daughter. That flash of vision which had come to her on the speech day at The Towers had not wholly vanished; it still dispensed its faint, uncertain afterlight upon her thoughts of Kay. A new humility, that puzzled and distressed her, informed her attitude to the child; she struggled against it, often, with resentment, for she felt it was an “unsuitable” attitude, from a mother to her daughter. She would deliberately call up visions of Kay sullen, stubborn, short of speech and ungracious, to combat that delicate stranger, that young, pale Prunella, speaking her last, heart-rending lines—“In the autumn let me die.” And it was always the stranger who triumphed, whose gleam came gradually through the scowl of the remembered Kay, until, as by an act of transformation the frowning Kay had vanished, was absorbed into the creature of light, the one who weakened all Rose’s resistance, all her conventional theories of a mother’s “authority” over her daughter. Never again, although she would have been torn in pieces rather than have admitted it, would she have “authority” over Kay.

“Well, how did Kay get on in the play?” Richard had asked on her return from Hampshire.

"Very well," she had answered gruffly. Not even with Richard—had she had the vocabulary—could she have shared the mystery of her experience.

Another thing that had troubled her, during the Easter holidays: Kathleen was growing up, and, for some reason, in her case it was not the easy, plant-like process which it had been in the case of Rose and her brothers and sisters. I've got to take more trouble, she told herself; I must try and sympathise more, and take an interest in the sort of things she cares about. Even in her craze for reading. Not that I can be expected to start reading books at my time of life, and with all I've got on my hands! But I might get her to talk about these novels, or whatever it is she's keen on; she might even read to me a bit, while I'm doing something else; I can stand most things except poetry. I might get her to read ~~me~~ that play; I dare say I'd get a clearer notion of what it was about, if it was read to me.

I feel she's growing away from me; it oughtn't to be like that, as they get older. Mother used to say, "My daughter's my daughter all my life." I mustn't get out of touch with Kathleen. It's difficult, when I see so little of them, but I've got to try. Mother and daughter should be companions; it's queer, that it should be so much easier with Jo. My word, how that child reminds me of Laura!—though she'll never be as pretty. ~~Funny little~~ cuss! She's a regular Lambton; Father would have been crazy about her. Poor Katie. I wonder if she remembers her tonic, and if they see she changes her shoes after games.

The one satisfactory thing I've done with my money was taking out that insurance, to make sure Kathleen has an income from the time she's twenty-one. She will never stand up to the rough and tumble, like Jo. And if all goes well, we'll move into another place when I have them home for good: somewhere in the suburbs, with a nice piece of garden. There'll have to be a good train service—or perhaps it will run to a small car, by then. It looks as if Remmy put me on to a good thing in this nursing home: though he's got a lot of capital to get back, before we start raking in the shekels! I may have to ask the duke to wait a bit before he gets back his money, but he's a nice fellow. Think of old Flora turning

up 'such trumps! It only shows you should take people as you find them; the rest's their business, not yours.

* But how nice and steady it will be, after all these haphazard years! Phew. It will be like coming to the end of a race, and, candidly, I can do with a breather. I've cut some pretty near corners in my time, too; look out, Rose, I've said to myself, or you'll be getting warned off!"

One thing I've made up my mind about: no more loans to Stan and Ozzy. If Stan's such a rotten business man he can't manage his own affairs, that's his look-out by now. And I'm not paying for Ozzy's wife to stand her flash friends drinks at the Café Royal; my word, I'd like to have seen his face, if he'd caught her! He's got a nasty awakening coming to him one day, has that lad, but he won't have it from me. No; all I earn from now on is going on Kathleen and Jo—with a bit, I hope, for myself; you've deserved it, old girl!—although I say it that shouldn't.

Jo's measles ran their usual violent course; she measles as wholeheartedly as she did most things, and took an enormous interest in herself as a patient. When she was getting better, George and Hetty, alternately, insisted upon coming up in the evenings—and Hetty, usually, on early closing days—so that Rose could get out of doors and have her exercise, without which her energy and her spirits were both apt to flag.

It was on one of those Thursday "early-closings" that she was strolling home from St. James's, making her way towards Piccadilly, where she wanted to get some wine jelly for Jo, when, glancing desultorily towards the windows of the antique dealers, a face leapt so vividly from its dark background that she was brought to a standstill on the pavement. Rose's long sight was much better than her short; she stood out in the stream of passers-by, unconscious of mutters and glances of irritation, with her eyes fixed upon the object which, from its elevation in a show case, had arrested her attention.

Kathleen! The small, frail face, framed in loose ashen hair, the languid posture of the head, the heavy eyes and long, delicately modelled throat were, in Rose's vocabulary, "Kathleen all over." She took a step nearer, cautious, incredulous, and drew out her glasses to inspect at nearer range the little enamelled patch- or snuff-box—it might have been either—from which the disconcerting likeness looked dreamily towards

her. The child might have sat for it! Before Rose had time to think, she was inside the shop, rather puzzled as to procedure, for she had never entered such a place before, and had not the least idea what she might be asked to pay for the box.

The price gave her a shock. The dealer saw it, and became supercilious.

"These rare pieces, madam, always fetch their price. I can show you something in another class——"

"No, I wouldn't be interested." She had taken off her gloves; her strong fingers handled the little box reflectively; she felt herself possessing—knew that she must possess—it. "I'll give you——"

A pained look crossed the dealer's face.

"I'm afraid we're not open to an offer. As I say, this piece is exceptionally fine—I might say a collector's piece. We have only had it in our possession a few hours, and I very much doubt whether it will be here by this time to-morrow. Several of our customers are interested in work of this class and period."

She felt her heart quicken its beat, the grip of her fingers tighten. Don't be a fool! she told herself. He's trying to jump you. She asked coolly:

"What's the period?"—and knew from the almost imperceptible flicker of the man's eyelids that she had made some sort of a gaffe. She set her lips, frowning at him defiantly:

"If you care to look with this, madam"—he was offering her a magnifying glass—"you will see the signature."

She looked; it conveyed nothing to her.

"H'm . . . What would I get for it, if I wanted to sell it again?"

Again the eyelids flickered.

"That would depend, of course, on the buyer. Disposing of it privately—as much, or more, than you paid for it. In an auction, you might get considerably more, particularly if collectors were bidding."

"And if I brought it back to you, to dispose of it for me?" She was speaking idly—gaining time—for she knew that once she had the thing in her possession, nothing on earth would persuade her to part with it.

"Well, madam"—the dealer smiled aloofly—"we have, of course, our profits to consider."

Rose drew out her cheque-book.

It was pure chance that, coming out of the shop, she walked straight into Remington. He looked at the name blazoned above the entrance, pursed his lips and let out a whistle.

"What's it to-day, Rose? Tang horses or a nice bit of *famille vert*? Glad to see you gambling on the success of our venture."

She could not refrain from exhibiting her purchase. Her heart was still ticking guiltily; she must have been crazy, to spend all that money. She watched his face greedily, anxiously, as he examined it; Remmy knew about these things; he would know if she had been "done" or not.

"My word!" His expression showed mingled respect and astonishment at this unexpected proof of her good taste: an illusion Rose proceeded, characteristically, to destroy.

"You see who it is? Go on, Remmy, you know I wouldn't buy a thing like this for fun."

He chuckled.

"Now you mention it, I suppose it's a little like Kay?" Good old Rose! She had no idea of posing as an amateur of the arts.

"A little!" She was scornful. "It's the spitten image!"

"Well, whatever it is—you've got a damned fine piece there; so don't start putting your cigar ash in it. I suppose you know it's Sèvres?" He waved her good-bye from the door of his car.

Sèvres, that was French. French, and old, she was thinking, as she came out of Fortnum's with the jelly. On impulse, she crossed the road, and entered Sotheran's.

"Have you got any books about this sort of thing?" For the second time she displayed her purchase, and was gratified, not only by the salesman's admiration, but by his evident respect. Rose became thoughtful; she had never commanded this type of respect before. She did not deserve it, of course, because she did not know a thing about it, and had only bought it for the sake of Kathleen. Yet a titillation of pride, mingled with excitement, ran through her. If only Katie had been here, to share the fun with her!

She came out of Sotheran's with a large expensive volume under her arm. In the taxi she opened it, to look at the

coloured plates; they were certainly beautiful. The letterpress defeated her; she would have to take a good look at that another time. "From the collection of the Earl of Letchington." She took out the little box again, to compare it with the plate. Well, I don't know; but this looks to me as good as anything they've got in here. "From the collection of Mrs. Rose Timson." Oh, come off it, you old silly! You've just spent a shocking sum of money and it's gone to your head.

"Katie, darling," she wrote that evening

"... It's funny you should tell me about the collections, because I've just started collecting myself. You'll see, when you come home. What do you think? I've bought a book to tell me all about it! So you see there's a bit of culture in mother, after all!"

She did not know, nor would have cared, that she had laid the foundation of the jackdaw-like accumulation of beauty and rubbish which was to become her vagary in later years: "Mother's crotchet," as the girls called it. She did not know it would become a habit, when people asked what she would like for Christmas or birthday presents, to say, "Oh, some sort of a little box." French, Italian, Swiss, Spanish boxes; boxes from Mexico and distant Caribbean islands; boxes in silver-gilt, porcelain, glass, leather repoussée, stone and wood mosaic—chased, perforated, painted, inset with precious stones—even horrors in antimony ("Oh, Mother, you can't put that beast in your collection!"), she never threw one away, although, as her standard of living altered, the cheaper and uglier ones were hidden in drawers, to leave room for the gems that were displayed in her cabinets.

Rose foresaw none of this, as she struck the stamp on her letter and walked down Plymouth Street, to drop it in the box. She only felt that she had forged a link—perhaps, with luck, only the first of many, with Kay.

It was one of the rare, enchanted summers one gets in England, with every day opening in a golden haze, and closing in that symphony of dark rapturous green and glimmer one

finds only in the English countryside. For the first time in her life, Kay awoke to the piercing shrillness of bird-call, looked from her bedroom window, deepset in warm Tudor stone, across the park shrouded in mist, where the delicate figures of the deer came and went like phantoms between the blurred trunks of the trees; saw with delight the small, emerald-green spots of rabbits across the silver of the dew-soaked lawns; heard the *roucoulement* of the doves from their cot in the middle of the sunk garden, and inhaled the perfume of flowers fresh and earthy from their soil. Sometimes she ached with a sense of intolerable loveliness.

Susan, with unexpected understanding, left her to do very much as she liked; she knew there was nowhere Kay could get into trouble, on Somervell land; that if she strayed into the woods, gamekeepers or foresters could set her on the right track home. Once or twice Susan took her down to her own home in the village, but she quickly realised that Kay was happier by herself than with the hearty Clayborne brood, and went off with a quiet heart for long chats with her mother, or to nurse the last of her sister's long succession of infants.

Walking waist deep through bracken, or perched on a branch overhanging the broad stream that bubbled under Somervell oaks, Kay's one regret was, inevitably, that Richard was not there. That, of course, would have been too perfect! Flung on the grass, pressing herself into the warm soil, she gave herself up, sometimes, to vague, turbulent imaginings, to raptures undefined, but present like shapes of dull, blurred gold in her dawning feminine consciousness. Love had roused in her a passionate curiosity about sex; she had suddenly become aware of her body, and of the part it might play in the orchestration of passion. Like a strung instrument, she was willing to give herself to the musician's hand; she suffered because, alone, she could not liberate the imprisoned song of her small, ripening form, or exploit its beauties which she had begun, indistinctly, to suspect.

None of the terse, utilitarian instruction which Rose had taken care to give her children before sending them to boarding school entered at all into Kay's imaginings; experience had provided for her no bridge between the practical world and the one of erotic fantasy in which, like some lost bird,

her spirit strayed. Curiously enough, that one squalid experience of her childhood provided no key to the mysteries which, almost unceasingly, she pondered. The Man on the Common; she remembered it sometimes, with glaring vividness, and, invariably, a sense of darkness and guilt. The memory lay there, coiled like a dark worm, deep in the texture of her consciousness; now and again she looked at it, was fascinated, and shuddered away. That had nothing to do with love—the love for which she now lived; and she was puzzled, sometimes, and appalled, that, in a moment of ecstasy, the worm could lift its dark head and remind her of itself—why? Why? Half frenzied, she would thrust it away, and drag the golden texture of her dreams around her for protection.

All of her love for poetry was now bent to slaking her thirst for knowledge. For Kay, no more "white Platonic dreams," but burning intimations that came to her "out of the golden remote wild west where the sea without shore is"; the beat of Swinburne's erotic dactyls was the beat of her blood, her head swam with the sweet, strangling incense of Dowson. Although she had not access to the library at the Court, was too shy to ask for it, and would, in any case, have been baffled by its scope, there were sufficient books scattered about "the old nursery wing" which she and Susan occupied to feed her hunger for reading: books which would certainly have caused a flutter among the nurses and governesses of its former occupants; for, as the Somervell children grew up, and filled the house with their friends, the old, secluded wing had been pressed into service for extra guest rooms, and had surrendered, in part, the pristine character of its original dedication.

Thus it came to pass that, on the bookshelves which lined the passages, and were tucked into the alcoves of the former nursery, now a comfortable sitting-room where their meals were served—De Maupassant jostled *Black Beauty* and *Alice in Wonderland*; *Flowers of Brimble* leaned modestly upon *Pleurs du Mal*, Hall Caine and Henty, D. H. Lawrence and Mrs. Molesworth were jumbled together in a confusion which no one, seemingly, had ever tried to resolve. Here was the complete set of Swinburne for which Kay had longed, upon which she swooped like a little doe in search of water. In

two or three, in a large, undisciplined hand that almost swamped the fly-leaf, the owner's name was written: "Cynthia Somervell."

She had tried, once or twice, to learn more of Lady Cynthia, and had earned a snub from Susan that made her wince.

"It's bad manners to pry into people's private affairs. If Mr. Dick wanted you to know anything about his marriage, he'd have told you himself."

She knew that village people and servants gossiped, and that it would have been easy to find out more, if she took the trouble; but some inner delicacy kept her from a course she knew he would have disapproved. Besides, he would tell her all, one day. One day in the not-so-far-off-time when she was grown up! She felt she had started to grow up very fast. Only another term—and she was free. How could she have been so foolish as to have begged for another year?—and how fortunate that Mummy had not taken her at her word! Her dread of entering prematurely into the adult world was flung behind, together with other childish things. Only to get to him, to find the solution of all her teasing uncertainties, had become her one desire.

She would pause upon a line of poetry, to imagine him fishing in Scotland. Fishing was a long, solitary and silent occupation, in which one had time to think. Did he think of her, as she of him? It struck her that they might now have written to each other, but he had left her no address, and she did not care to ask Susan for it. He could at least write to her! For a while she clung desperately to this hope; the arrival of the post became a time of sickening suspense, of agonising aftermath. Surely it might have occurred to him?

From such wistful reproaches of the beloved, she turned to the locked diary—which, unfortunately, was no longer locked; she had lost the key soon after the beginning of term. She had to be very careful where she kept it, suffered a hundred heart-shaking apprehensions, and was thankful to prove them unfounded. Under the mattress was the safest place, she had concluded; and here, at Verney, it was almost always with her: in the crochet knapsack into which she put her books, or the sandwiches Susan cut for her lunch—which went with her, slung over her shoulder, in all her wanderings. Dear Susan;

she was so understanding. She seemed to know how wonderful it was, just to be alone.

On a blazing morning she read *Tristram of Lyonesse* in one of her favourite hiding places by the stream, which here forked, flung one broad silver streamer across the park and plunged the other, a quivering arrow, into the green heart of the woods. Exhausted at last, by the fever and languor of the lines, she flung herself back on the grass, and lay panting in the summer heat, which matted the hair on her brow and soaked the collar of her dress. She loosened it for comfort, holding the damp linen away from her throat, which brought momentary relief, but had little effect against the smoking pressure of the mid-day heat.

Presently she looked about her, at the green emptiness of the wood and fields. It would surely be safe, if she went a little way deeper under the trees? Dragging herself up, she stumbled farther along the bank, dipping under branches, reaching at last a green cave of leaves that flickered over the small chattering of the stream. Oh, yes, this is safe enough, she thought, as she dragged the crumpled frock over her head and let it fall to the ground. She lifted her arms, cool and bare—cooler for their dampness, in the shade. Oh, that was lovely. Kicking off her sandals, she felt the earth, rough and dry under the tender soles of her feet. They *are* lovely legs and feet, she reflected, looking down at them; I wonder if he's ever noticed . . . ? She pulled up her knickers, to see the loveliness extending even higher: the bronzed gold of below the knee melting into the pure ivory of narrow thighs, slender, but firm with gymnastics and games.

Oh, in this summer heat, how lovely to be naked!—and why not, in this hidden place, as secret as a closed room? A faint tremor of excitement passed through Kay, as vest and knickers joined the frock on the ground; she stood with the shadows of leaves dappling her nakedness and throwing a subtle reflection of green into the tender flesh—half shy of this out-door nakedness, different, somehow, from the nakedness of the bathroom. Straight, straight like a wand, with hands pressed close to faintly vibrant thighs; she looked down at her hands, spreading the fingers until they clasped like plant tendrils the narrow ivory columns: drawing them slowly

upwards, to rest on the almost imperceptible curve of the hips, on the small cage of the ribs, and at last cupping themselves beneath the breasts—so little, so insignificant, with their unformed tips of rose!

A sudden wave of consciousness engulfed her; her knees sagged, seemingly without her own volition, sought the warm earth; her body doubled itself upon them, as though to hide herself from herself. The sun beat down upon the nape of her neck, upon her lowered head, the scattered parting of her hair. Kay knelt there a long time: in shame—in worship—she did not know which.

After a long time—it seemed—the cramping of her limbs forced her to unfold herself; she slipped on her side. Presently she took another quick, shy look at this strange, ungarmented Kay. Her eyes half closed: yes . . . yes. It was natural to lie like this, naked in a wood, feeling oneself part of the wood—beautiful—and wild—and waiting. Waiting—to be discovered.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AS THE autumn wore on, Rose realised that the last nine years had taken a heavy toll of her. During those years she had been working full-time and over-time, the strain on her nerves not less than the strain on her muscles; she had given recklessly, not only of her physical strength, but of that indefinable quality known as personality—that essence of the human being, so greedily sought by those who are deficient in it themselves. She was weary of sick, neurotic, decadent humanity, from which the healthy animal in her recoiled, even in the act of ministering to it. She felt drained, and, for her, deeply depressed, at the end of the day, when she let herself into the house and thanked God that another twenty-four hours was over.

Susan had a bright fire blazing in the parlour; her slippers were warming, her dinner was laid on a low table beside the easy-chair. She flung down her hat and coat in the hall for Susan to collect, and dropped on the couch, closing her eyes for a few moments' rest before eating. While she lay there, a ring came at the bell.

She seldom had casual visitors, and felt no apprehension as she listened to Susan going to the door; it would be a late delivery from one of the shops, or somebody looking for lodgings—the house next door let rooms, and people sometimes mistook the number. She heard a low murmur of voices, which seemed to be unduly prolonged—then the sound of the hall door closing, and the opening of the parlour door behind her head.

"I could do with my dinner now, Susan; you can fetch it, if it's ready."

As Susan did not immediately answer, Rose sat up and looked round. Susan was standing against the closed door of the parlour, with a more than usually impassive look on her habitually inexpressive face.

"It is Mr. Timson."

"*What?*" said Rose.

It came like a blow on the head. Something had cracked, letting the past ooze through. It could not be true: Harry, coming again into her life, bringing the sordid and forgotten years with him? What was his purpose in coming? There could be only one, she thought bitterly.

For a moment she sat motionless, passing the tip of her tongue along her dry lips.

"All right," she said presently. "Don't bring the food up. I'll call when I'm ready."

She waited for Susan to go downstairs; then she stood up, collecting and arming herself, and went into the narrow hall.

"Hallo, Harry," she said shortly.

"Hallo, Rose." He stood, grinning down at her, sheepishly. Rose turned without another word and led the way back into the room. For a moment there was silence; she was taking a cigarette out of the silver box and lighting it; when it was going, she turned, and barely repressed a start.

She had forgotten Harry; forgotten this shifty, shambling, male version of Kathleen, who stood there in a cheap overcoat, conscious of her resentment, grinning it off, as he used to do in the old days. A pang of disgusted pity ran through her. Why had he got to look so mean? Why, if he was as down-and-out and wretched as he appeared, couldn't he put a bold face on it, instead of looking out of the corners of his eyes, half cringing, as if he expected her to attack him? So

that's why I've had no money for the last two years, she reflected; I thought as much.

"Well, Harry."

His unsteady eyes took in his surroundings, then returned mockingly to hers.

"'Tis joy to him that toils, when toil is o'er,
To find home waiting, full of happy things,"

he quoted, with irony. Rose felt herself wince; this was indeed the old Harry, unaltered, unreformed!

"Oh, shut up!—and tell me what you're doing here."

"So this is where you've got to." He gave a foolish laugh. "I see why you haven't been bothering me for the money, Rose!"

"It looks as if I'd have been wasting my time, if I had." She allowed her eyes to rest for a moment on his dingy collar, the frayed edges of his cuffs: and looked away, as if they affronted her.

"Well—I suppose there's no charge for sitting?" He tried to be jaunty, and was only pert. She made a gesture with the hand that held the cigarette, and kept her own place on the hearthrug. He sat down, fumbled a packet of Capstan out of his coat and extracted the solitary cigarette it contained. She saw it had been lighted and stubbed out; smothering an exclamation, she pushed the box towards him.

"Oh, for God's sake! Don't light a stale cigarette."

He accepted one of hers with a grimace.

"So that's the way it is now, is it? Ah, well! 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought I summon up remembrance of things past'—eh? Remember those fag ends we used to fight over? How you hid 'em where you thought I wouldn't find 'em?" She felt herself redden, as "the street" came back to her, with all its joyless squalor: "the street" to which ten years of marriage to a tippler had reduced her—Rose Lambton of Crowle!—and where she and the children might be living now, but for her own efforts. "How's the kids, Rose?"

"They're all right." She wished she had not put their photographs on the top of her writing desk—the last ones, taken a year ago: very smart, in their "Towers" embroidered

djibbabs. She made a movement to step between them and the peering curiosity of Harry, but checked herself; it was useless—and, after all, he was their father. . . .

"How did you find out where we were living?" she be-thought herself to ask.

"Oh, I just asked around." Of course; it would be easy enough. "The street," then her room at Streatham—one had to leave one's address, because of messages. Or he might even have had the nerve to go to Stanley or Albert; they would tell him where she was, quickly enough! They had never held with the divorce; they would give her away, just to punish her.

"Well, Harry: what do you want, now you're ~~here~~?" No point in prolonging this distasteful situation.

He seemed not to have heard the question; he had the photographs in his hands, looking at them—almost as if he cared.

"How's Jo? I'd like to see the kids."

Something inside her went hard, like iron.

"Well, you won't see them. If necessary"—characteristically, she sailed right into the wind—"I'll pay you not to see them. That's what you came for; isn't it?"

He looked round at her, as if she amused him.

"You were never one for finesse, were you, Rose?"

"Oh, there's no need to beat about the bush." She spoke roughly, as one afraid of her own pity. "I know you——"

"Do you, Rose? Do you?"

A note in his voice checked her; she broke off, stood staring up at him, her lips parted, as though she would have spoken, but could not find the words. He put the photographs down quietly, and went back to his chair.

"I've not come back for money. I've come because I'm—lonely" He said it very simply, looking, not at her, but at the fire; it was a second or two before she remembered that this was only Harry's acting. But he had given her a surprise.

"Do you mean your Mrs. What's-her-name has left you?"

"*'Pour être constant, il faut être immortel.'* The fair Hannah was nothing if not mortal! She went in less than a year," he told her, as if this was an inevitable thing, only to be expected, in the circumstances. She was angry with herself for finding pathos in the grin he gave her, displaying the

dilapidated teeth which she remembered, once, as fine and even as her own.

"Well, Harry . . . I'm sorry," she said, after a pause.

"Oh, that's all right." He was off-handed in his disclaimer of pity on that score. "I expect I'd have found it a bit stiff, keeping the four of you!"

"I hope you don't imagine you ever kept us!"

"I gave you what you asked for," he pointed out, truthfully. "At least, I gave it while I'd got it."

"And now you've not got enough to keep yourself."

"I hadn't," he corrected her. "You know what it's been like, looking for work, since the war was over."

"Knowing you, I don't suppose you looked very hard."

"Well, I've got a job now—with the old people," he told her patiently. "They've knocked my salary down, but that's how it goes, these days; there's too many after the jobs to stand out for money. I'm starting again, next week."

"I'm glad of that." She tried to force some warmth into her voice. She looked round the room, wondering why she felt frightened—much more frightened of this mild, reasonable Harry than of the one she remembered. "What about a drink?" She said it desperately, needing one herself. She got the whisky out of a cabinet, not looking at him as she poured it out. "There you are. Well—cheers to your job."

"I've not told you why I came."

She felt cold in the roots of her hair.

"Well, Harry . . . I'm pleased to see you, for the sake of old times." She hoped it did not sound too insincere.

"I want to come back."

Emotion burned in her: first a wild terror, then anger and resentment, and last a bitter irony.

"I dare say! Now I've got money of my own! Now I've got a house and furniture and a drink to offer you! What do you take me for? A ninny?"

"I can't keep you, or the girls, but I can keep myself. I won't be a charge on you." He continued as though she had not spoken. "I'm lonely. I want a home, and I want the kids. I want Jo."

"So you've come to the end of things, have you? Your friends won't buy you drinks, because you can't afford to treat them, and the women won't look at you any longer!" Words

flowed out of her, terrible words which, afterwards, she could not believe she had spoken! "Why, you fool!"—she was mild, at last, with exhaustion—"we're divorced! You can't live with me—it would be the same as if I was your mistress; only it's usual for mistresses to be kept, and you'd be my kept man!"

"I've told you I can make enough for myself, and we could get married again." He said it passionlessly, ignoring her outburst.

"How do you know I'm not married?" she taunted him.

He looked at her.

"No, Rose. You're not that kind of woman," he said quietly.

She bit her lip. She was no longer afraid, she had herself in hand. It was as if her past violence had given her courage; she was no longer frightened of her own pity, of Harry's intolerable likeness to Kathleen, or of any of the things that might have weakened her and undermined her defences. She was strong again, strong and calm. For the first time since his arrival she allowed herself to sit in her own armchair.

"Listen, Harry. I'm sorry I spoke like that—you took me by surprise. I don't bear you any ill-will—now; all that's over and done with, and you know I'm not one to harp on old grievances. And while I think of it, I don't want any more alimony from you; we can manage now, by ourselves. But what you suggest is out of the question, and I'll try to show you why.

"I've made a new life for myself, and you don't fit into it." She was speaking slowly, trying to find the right words. "It's a pity, for you would have done, once. It's the sort of life I took for granted we'd have, when I married you. I never expected I'd have to tell the landlord lies, or be frightened to open the door to tradesmen; why should I? You were in a good job and you were sure of keeping it—at least, that's what you said; and I took your word for it.

"It wasn't much of a home you took me to, as a bride, but you promised me we'd have a better one. I didn't see why we shouldn't; you were clever and skilled at your trade. I stuck up for you to my family, who all thought I was marrying beneath me—though I allow they hadn't done so well for themselves. You knew the sort of home I'd come from, and

you swore I'd have as good, and better than I was accustomed to, in a few years' time.

"You know how you kept that promise, Harry. We soon left that first house—we were always moving—and it was to a cheaper and worse one every time. We practically finished in a slum—and I should think it would have been jail, or the workhouse, next, if I hadn't made up my mind. You made a big fuss of Jo, but you didn't worry about her being dragged up alongside of gutter children, did you? I can't understand you over that, because it wasn't as if you were used to that kind of thing yourself. You were educated—much more than I was; but it made no difference. You only cared for yourself and your appetites, and you were prepared to sacrifice all of us, so long as you could satisfy them. That's why I had to divorce you; not because I minded about Mrs. Hornby. I couldn't have the girls going without the clothes and the shoes they needed, while you were Hornbying round the pubs.

"Well, they've forgotten all that. To be candid, Harry, I don't believe they ever give you a thought, or even wonder what's become of you."

"That's a nice thing to say to a father!"

"Now, don't speak like that." Her beautiful eyes reproached him. "I don't mean to be unkind, and I've got over my temper, but you'll make me mad again if you start whining. It's too late to talk about being a father now, Harry, so you can cut it out!"

"I've worked like a black and I've had precious little fun while I've been doing it; but I think I've accomplished what I set out after. They've forgotten the street, and all those sordid times, and the bad habits they learned through mixing with children from nasty homes. And I won't have you back because I won't have them reminded of it. You don't suppose you can just drift in, and be accepted, without their wanting to know what's been going on, all the time you've been away? I had to tell them some time ago about the divorce, and Kathleen, at any rate, is old enough to know what divorce means. I'm not going to start her working things over in her mind—she's old enough, in some ways, as she is already."

His lips were dragged sideways over the stub of the cigarette; he might have been grinning or snarling. She gave him quick look and went on.

"Another thing. I've got to consider myself. Yes, I think it's time I did a bit of considering on my own account, as nobody's likely to do it for me. I've got my own friends: people you wouldn't get on with, and who wouldn't get on with you. I'm not going to sacrifice my friendships to your loneliness, Harry. And that," said Rose, with relief, "is my last word."

"So you're ashamed of me, are you?" He said it unpleasantly, and she looked him straight in the eyes.

"No. Ashamed of myself, for being too pig-headed to take good advice."

"Rose." He had risen, and now made a movement towards her—a movement whose significance she knew, but she no longer shrank from it.

"You can lay off that, Harry," she told him calmly, "or I'll call the police in, and have you put out. I don't want that from you or any other man any longer—thank God! I suppose I ought to thank you, too, for wearing that out of my system; for if a woman's got her own way to make, it's hard luck on her if she happens to have any womanly feelings!"

"I believe you're as hard as nails," he muttered.

"I'm exactly what you've made me, and if you don't like it, that's your misfortune." She got up briskly. "I'd ask you to stop and have supper, but my servant mightn't understand it. You've given her enough of a shock already—announcing yourself as Mr. Timson!" She put her hand in her pocket—it was one of Rose's eccentricities to carry her money loose, like a man—and held out a pound note to him. "Get yourself a good supper, and pretend you're eating it with me—if that's any satisfaction to you!"

The look he gave her would have checked a more sensitive woman. Honest in her intention, her perception would not allow her to realise that she could not have humiliated him more deeply. Damn her! he was thinking. Damn her and her money to hell. He would have liked to refuse it, but the thought of what it would stand for in the taverns off Fleet Street sapped the roots of such pride as he had retained. He pocketed it without thanks, thinking, It means no more to her than a shilling, and she would not even understand if I told her what she has made me feel about it.

"Come on; get your hat. I'll see you out," said Rose.

Suddenly he burst into a harsh laugh, which, taking Rose by surprise, startled her.

"*Quantum quisque sua nummorum servat in arca, Tantum habet et fidei!*" He waggled an insulting finger under her nose. "To think of my marrying a woman who doesn't know a word of Latin!" he jeered. "The sage yoked with the ass! Never mind; I'll translate it for your benefit—or rather, I will tender its meaning in the words of an Englishman, hardly less famous in his time than my old friend Juvenal—though who reads Fielding nowadays? 'Sir,' says Fielding—though through the lips of one of his own characters—'money, money, the most charming of all things; money, which will say more in one moment than the most eloquent lover can in years. Perhaps you will say a man is not young; I answer, he is rich. He is not genteel, handsome, witty, brave, good-humoured, but he is rich, rich, rich, rich, rich!—and that one word contradicts everything you can say against him.'"

"You're drunk," said Rose calmly. "I suppose that whisky's the first thing that's gone into your stomach to-day. Go on now—get your supper; I want to have mine and get to bed."

He gave another look round the room, seeking some last word to punish her for the shame she had put on him.

"At any rate, I'll know where to come if I'm short of a pound!"

Rose, at the door, turned quickly to face him.

"If you ever come here again, I'll give you in charge; that's not a joke, I'm serious."

"That'll look well in the papers!" he jeered.

"I don't give a damn," she bluffed him. "If you're ever in a tight corner, you can go to my solicitors. You know who they are—the same ones that did the divorce. I'll instruct them, and they'll use their own discretion; so you needn't waste your breath in making up a fairy tale. But if you ever come near me or the girls again—as God's my judge, I'll have you jailed! Good-night, Harry—and when you get your salary, for goodness' sake get yourself a new overcoat: that one looks as if the rats have been in it."

Have I made him afraid of me? Can I really get protection against Harry? Whatever happens—if he bleeds me dry—he shan't get near the girls. Not near Kathleen. It would be the death of Kathleen, if she saw her father.

As she closed the street door, her hand was shaking. All her fear had returned. She called down the basement stairs for her supper, and poured herself half a tumbler of whisky, spilling it on her hand as she did so. I've got to pull myself together. I must be in a rotten state, to let Harry upset me like this.

I'd better have some advice, she was thinking. She would have to keep her promise and see her solicitors—with whom she had had no personal dealings since the divorce. She had posted her will to them, that was all; they had written, proposing some amendments, and she had accepted their suggestions. But that meant, of course, they were still her solicitors. They were a sharp, Jewish firm: it would not be easy to talk to that young man with hair like wet patent leather and a jockey's face about as personal an affair as this of Harry's. Poor old Harry . . .

"You look very tired, Mrs. Timson. Let me slip a glass of sherry in the soup, and hot it up again——"

"No fear. I should be bingo." She held up the glass of whisky. "My God, I forgot the soda; it's neat."

Susan took the glass quietly, pressed the trigger of the syphon and brought it back to Rose's side.

"I'll put the fire on in your room."

"What would you do if you'd got a husband who turned up the wrong moment?" She plunged her spoon greedily into the soup; that was it—she was ravenous!

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Susan thoughtfully. "Why don't you ask Mr. Somervell?"

"Is he back in England?" She raised her head quickly.

"I saw his name in *The Times* last week—at somebody's memorial service," was the calm reply.

"That's not a bad idea"—she was careful to be casual.

Indeed, why not get him to come and see her? They had seen very little of each other, for nearly six months. During the holidays he had been up in Scotland—which, for some reason, had not displeased her—and then she had had a short note from him, telling her he was going to Vienna. Rose had begun to wonder if he was getting tired of their friendship. She did not wish to think it was so, for Richard Somervell's was one of the few friendships she minded about keeping. She was perhaps a little flattered that a man of his type

should call her a friend of his; in moments of rare sentimentality, she admitted to herself that if she were ever to consider marrying again, he would be the one to persuade her—after which she always braced herself by remembering that he was married already, and that, if he was not, he was not the kind to marry out of his own class. She always chuckled at herself over these rather vapid imaginings, more becoming to a girl in her twenties than a woman of mature years. But it sometimes occurred to her that she had, for most of her life, been starved of sentiment, and that indulging in an occasional fancy of this sort was not much more harmful than stealing a chocolate out of a box of candies.

It was odd that, although her work lay entirely among women, all her real friends were men. There was George, of course—dear old stick-in-the-mud—and Dr. Remington; there were two or three whom she had picked up casually on railway stations or in bars—Rose made friends as easily as she breathed, and her unmistakable candour usually prevented her from being misunderstood. Chance acquaintances easily solidified into friendships, and she had even had a couple of proposals—which she had jollied aside with so much goodwill that no bitterness was left behind. There was Mr. Somervell—and now there was the Duke! That made her laugh every time she thought of it. The idea of her being friends with a duke! The fact that his intentions were, from the beginning, transparently dishonourable made no difference to their good fellowship, for Rose knew how to deal with that kind—although, to do them justice, the men (at least, those who knew her well) had not put her to much trouble.

Of all these, Richard Somervell was the only one to whom she could talk freely about Harry; for she knew that his imagination and the fineness of his nature would help him to understand her fear, her anxiety and the "soft spot" she was still obliged to acknowledge for her former husband. It was one of the anomalies of Rose's character that she could appreciate in others the qualities in which she herself was most conspicuously lacking. Herself neither delicate nor sensitive, it interested, and, in a way, fascinated her to meet these finer shades of feeling in the sex which (she had been brought up to believe) was crude in comparison with her own.

Richard would not scoff, or dwell upon Harry's short-

comings in such a way as to make her feel she was a fool for wanting to do something for him; he would not point out to her that what she was proposing to do was tantamount to allowing Harry to blackmail her (which she knew already), or take George's pusillanimous line of advising her to leave it all to her solicitors. He would understand the human side of the situation: that a woman cannot live ten years with a man and bear him children without preserving some spot of feeling about him—unless she were devoid of feminine nature! Richard would give her sympathy as well as counsel. . . .

Furthermore, he would "take her out of herself," and this Rose considered was what she really needed. Her present anxiety had brought others crowding to her mind; she was, as usual, short of money, and heavily overdrawn, for her, at the bank, which, only the day before, had sent her a note of warning. She must have been crazy to tell Harry she would give up the alimony! It was only a drop in the ocean, but it would have helped with the light and the heating, and she need not have felt bad about taking it, if he was earning again. Kathleen's school fees would end, of course, at Christmas; but this would not help much, as she was already owing two terms. She was living much ahead of her means; that was the truth, and she must face it. But facing did not mean giving up; she had set herself a certain standard of living, and nothing should induce her to lower it—to fall back on the ladder she had climbed so painfully.

Yes, she must see Richard Somervell; a visit from him was always as good as a tonic; it was to be reminded of all those things which he took for granted, towards which she, for the children's sake, was struggling. It was to draw nearer in love and knowledge to Kathleen, who seemed to share with him so many things of which once, to her eternal shame, she had been jealous: which she now accepted, only hoping that she might be allowed some part in them as well. It was not, after all, her fault that she had not had the education she had managed to give her children; and, as time went on, she would no doubt have more opportunities of interesting herself in matters her circumstances had obliged her to neglect. Yes, she would send for Mr. Somervell. . . .

It was in this rather leaning and feminine state of mind

that she rang Richard's office in the morning—she would have telephoned him at night, but she had made a habit of going to bed early, and Richard, like most men leading a bachelor life, was rarely in before midnight. She was disappointed not to get him at the office, but as his secretary said he was in town, and asked if she could take a message, Rose said shortly that she would be writing: her own principle being not to fill the ears of underlings with information—a principle good enough in theory, but a little galling to those who take the trouble to provide themselves with responsible servants.

She wrote her note, and posted it, and in due course was made happy by Richard's reply—that he would come and have tea with her on the following Sunday.

CHAPTER NINE

THE WEEK of the examinations had arrived; Rose remembered to send Kay a wire, and reminded Richard to do the same—at which she thought he had seemed amused. He had probably remembered it without her reminder; he always remembered things to do with the children. And, actually, it was Jo's letter which had informed Rose of her parental duty on the occasion. "You will remember to send Kay a telegram, won't you, Mummy? Some of the girls get three or four. Some of the kids in my bedroom are sending her one! I think Mr. Dick would send her one if you told him. . . ."

Thank goodness all this would soon be over. It was no use telling Kathleen it did not matter if she passed or not; she had made up her mind it was a matter of life and death. Yes, Rose knew what it would be like: the pen gripped in cramped fingers, the knotted brows, the body twisted and bowed with anxiety. "For mercy's sake, child, put your work down and get out in the sunshine a bit! What'll it all be, a hundred years hence?" No one would have the sense to say that to her, as Rose had said it a dozen times in the holidays. "Oh, Mummy, I've got to finish my holiday work." If she was getting flustered, her lips would be moving, she would claw her fingers through her hair from brow to crown, leaving faint traces of ink in the gold-feathery roots, and no one

would stroke that piteous, over-anxious head and tell the child not to make a mountain out of a molehill!

Yet perhaps something had told the child that "Mother was thinking of her," for Kay's postcards arrived each morning. "Maths. to-day—awful. I'm sure I must have failed. French not so bad." "*Lovely* History paper! I might have a distinction, with luck." "Disappointed in English Essay. Such dull subjects. Don't think I did myself justice"—and so forth. Rose treasured these, although their contents conveyed little to her, as proofs that she had managed at last to establish the line of sympathy between herself and Kathleen for which she had longed.

One morning Rose received a registered parcel, on which, to her surprise, she recognised the headmistress's writing. Opening it, she found another packet, tied with brown tape and sealed, with a letter slipped under the tape. On the envelope were inscribed the words, "Please read this before you open the packet."

Rose found her glasses—which were always a nuisance because her eyelashes pushed them too far down on her nose—and began to read:

"Dear Mrs. Timson,

"I am afraid you will be distressed on receiving this, and I would rather not discuss it fully until I can see you in person. The enclosed book came into my hands to-day, and, in view of the fact that Kay has only another fortnight or so at The Towers, I feel it is a matter for you rather than for myself to deal with: particularly as it seems to concern her life in the holidays. and has nothing to do with us at school. I do not wish to speak to her about it while she is doing her papers, for I fear the upset it must cause might prejudice her results.

"I admit I am astonished, as my knowledge of Kay had not led me to anticipate any such state of affairs as her diary reveals. I would like to talk it over very fully with you before you decide what action to take, and although, as you know, this term, with the examinations and the preparations for speech day, is a very full one, I shall be glad to set aside an afternoon if you will let me know when it will be convenient for you to come. I would rather

postpone speaking to Kay, if possible, until I hear from you.

"I must add how very sorry I am that her last term at The Towers should be clouded by this unfortunate occurrence, for I should have liked to think she took only happy memories away with her.

"Yours sincerely,

A. H. MAITLAND."

What a long-winded screed! Rose was thinking, as she snapped the tape with her scissors. I suppose when a school teacher gets a pen in her hand, she doesn't know where to leave off! She was scornful to allay her own uneasiness, for she could not imagine what mischief Kathleen had got herself into. Had she been writing down "dirty" stories, or something the girls talked about in the dormitory? Absurd! Out of the question, in connection with Kay, to whom, she would take her oath, "that sort of thing" meant nothing at all. She fixed her glasses again.

She sat down, and read Kay's diary from the first to the last page.

Am I mad? wondered Rose, when she had finished. Or is Kay mad? Which of us is it?

A better educated, a more sensitive woman might have been less shocked: might have guessed that those feverishly scrawled pages indicated no state of vice, but a mental condition that needed treatment as careful as any ill of the body: that they represented a mind which had outstripped its own strength as rapidly as Kay's physical growth had outstripped the strength of her limbs. Such a woman—particularly if the matter had not concerned her own daughter—might have censured the action of the headmistress in sending the pitiful record to one like Rose Timson; surely she would have done better to have destroyed it, to have had a talk with Kay, and to have let it rest at that. Kay was leaving; the school's responsibility for her was at an end; responsibility now passed on to Rose—the last person in the world who could be expected to handle it. In fairness to the headmistress of The Towers, she had met Rose but briefly, among the crowds of parents' days; had probably not noticed her particularly, except as a pleasant, brisk woman, very like her younger daughter Jo,

who might, on sight, be credited with behaving sensibly with her children. After all, the head of a large school cannot be expected to analyse the parents as fully as she analyses the pupils.

Rose sat petrified.

Am I mad? Is Kathleen his mistress? Have the pair of them been fooling me? But what's this about travelling in France? She's out of her mind; she's never been abroad in her life—let alone with Richard Somervell. It's just a pack of wicked lies: nasty lies, too. To think of a child having such an imagination. Kathleen . . . that I thought didn't know anything; that I've brought up so carefully to be pure and clean, taking such care of all she saw and heard, telling her about birth and all that, so she shouldn't be upset by the nonsense girls talk among themselves; guarding my own tongue, so she should never hear anything loose or improper.

And he . . . *he!*—What's his share in this? She's not learned any of this by herself; what child would? Somebody's taught her—some man: and what men does she know, besides Somervell, and poor old George?—George as innocent as a babe—thinking the sun, moon and stars shine out of Katie—it would kill him to read this. It's Somervell. My God, I'll make him pay for this.

Not disturb her in the middle of the examinations? Damn the examinations! I bet they're at the root of it all; her mind's given way. She couldn't write these things, unless she was mad—stark, staring mad. I'll go to Hampshire this very day. I'll bring her back and get her to a doctor. She'll have to be examined. . . . Examined! My Katie! Mother's own dear girl. I'll go mad myself. I'll strangle him with my own hands. *So that's Richard Somervell.* That was his game, hanging around all these years, pretending to be such a friend of us all—and doing this to Katie. And to think of me not seeing through it. He shall pay for it—my God, he shall pay until his dying day.

Where's Bradshaw . . .

That's no good, it won't get the connection at Winchester. And what's the time? There'll be no chance of a local taxi. I'll hire a car. . . .

She was so giddy when she rose to go to the telephone that she staggered, and was obliged for a moment to lean on the

wall for support. The throbbing in her head almost frightened her; she felt as if she might at any moment lose control of herself completely, might scream, beat the walls, waste herself utterly in some wild outburst which would use up all the strength she needed for herself and for Kay. Gradually she forced herself to remain calm; but she felt her body bent like an old woman's, and the downward drag of age in all the lines of her face, as she went to her desk and drew the writing-pad towards her.

Kay stood by the headmistress's desk, on which lay her mother's wire: "Arriving 11.15 have Kathleen's things packed am bringing her home." Maddening woman, Miss Maitland was thinking; she must know the child has still got her Botany paper. I suppose I should not have written to her so soon, but I want to give her time to think things over before coming down to talk to me.

Kay's face was like chalk, and she swayed a little because the room kept rising and sinking in dark waves. Her eyes half closed, her lips parted over her chattering teeth, she looked terrible—as if she might be dying.

Miss Maitland was quite kind.

"You understand, Kay, it has been quite as much of a shock to me as it is to you."

"But it was private. . . . People aren't supposed to read private things."

"People aren't supposed to leave private things where other people can find them. Supposing one of the juniors had got hold of it? You're old enough to have a sense of responsibility about these things."

"Please give it back to me. Please give it to me, and I'll burn it or destroy it now, if you like"—although I shall be destroying my own self.

"I can't do that, Kay, because it isn't really my business to deal with it. It seems to be about something that happened in your holidays."

"None of it *ever* happened," she whispered. "I only pretended . . ."

Miss Maitland gave her a quick look, and nodded. It was as she suspected—a bad case of adolescent fantasia, with which, as Kay was leaving, she was rather glad to think she would

not have to deal. If the mother had common sense, she would take Kay to a psychoanalyst. It was not a matter for bullying, or being made to feel in eternal disgrace. It would have been a little difficult to cope with, in the community of school, but it was a pity, for the girl's sake, she should not have the opportunity of working it off in the lively and organised society of people of her own age.

"I believe what you tell me, and I'm sorry you are leaving us this term, for I think we could have helped you."

Help? Help? What help did she need but the one that was denied her.

"But you see, as you are going home for good, I feel the matter is rather out of my hands."

"Yes. Thank you." A ghost was speaking, a ghost which held out its pitiful hand. "Please, may I have my diary?"

Miss Maitland shook her head slowly; she was very sorry for the child.

"No, Kay, I can't give it to you."

"I promise I'll never write anything again."

Silence.

"Let me burn it! Let me——!"

"It isn't here. I sent it to your mother."

"You . . . sent it . . . to . . . Mother . . ."

For the first time, looking at the terrible little face in which the eyes were like charred holes, misgiving smote the headmistress. She half rose:

"You can explain it all to her, Kay; she will be here in"—she glanced at the clock—"about half an hour. *Kay!*"

Torn from the scabbard of his limbs . . . the powerful, fortress'd house—no more. . . . No refuge—any more . . .

"*Kay!*"

Lady Emily looked down on the top of her cousin's bowed head, as she laid a crumpled sheet of paper on her writing desk with a movement which suggested, for all its self-control, that she was glad to get it out of her fingers.

"Poor Dick. I am glad you have come to me."

"What are we going to do, Emily?"

She knitted her brows.

"We must think. I wish I knew of some way to help."

"If you don't help me," he said simply, "I'm done for."

She laid her hand for a moment lightly on his shoulder.

"Don't be foolish. Of course I will do whatever I can. But you must give me your word——" She paused; Richard lifted his head.

"That I won't have anything more to do with Kay?" he concluded her sentence for her. "You don't suppose I'll be allowed to—after that?" He pointed to Rose's letter.

"It's a terrible letter. An ill-balanced, preposterous letter—possibly libellous." Her crystalline aloofness banished Rose's outpourings to some distant plane beyond perspective. "It is such a letter as could only be written by a person who, for the time being, is practically—not responsible. Oh, Dick! You have caused great pain—to others, as well as to yourself."

"Never mind about me—or Rose. What will happen to Kay? What on earth do you imagine *has* happened? Where has Rose got all this——" He suppressed the epithet which rose to his lips, because to use it was in some way to defile Kay—the innocent Kay.

"We must try to find out. There is certainly some horrible misunderstanding. Of course, you could never be guilty!"

He was brought so low that he was grateful for her indignation.

"Thank you, Emily."

"But so far as influence goes," she pursued, "I am afraid you must be responsible. Oh, Dick!"—in her urgency she had clenched her hands. "You must never go near them again! I don't know what it was—I suppose some instinct—that made me dislike Mrs. Timson. I even wondered, at one time—it was wicked of me—whether she deliberately encouraged the friendship between you and Kathleen; one hears of such things——"

"You could not have done Rose a worse injustice," he told her gravely.

"I see that now!—and I'm so anxious to do all in my power to make amends. I can't see my way at all, at present, but there must be some means of straightening it out——"

"If there are, I am sure you are the one to find them, Emily."

She smiled faintly, touched by his humility, but was quickly grave again.

"But you must leave the matter *completely* in my hands,

Dick," she urged him. "How can I impress the importance of that on you? In spite of the lack of sympathy between us, I do believe that Mrs. Timson has enough respect for me to listen, if I talk to her. And of course"—she took a few agitated steps about the room—"we shouldn't leave it a moment longer than we can help. While she is in this frame of mind"—like Richard, she indicated the letter—"I'm very much afraid she might be capable of anything. Dick! She might even take it to the courts!" She faced him, halted by her horror.

He gave a mirthless laugh.

"Surely you noticed? That's one of the things she threatens—along with horsewhipping, and shooting, if I'm not mistaken!"

"For God's sake, don't make a jest of it. Can't you see we're in a horrible position?"

"It's kind of you to say 'we,' Emily. I don't know why I should draw you into my troubles."

A quick movement of her hand checked this disclaimer.

"There is another thing to be thought of: Kay herself."

"So far as I'm concerned, she's the only 'thing' that matters."

"If she's unhappy—a girl of that passionate nature—now this crisis has arisen—she might easily run away from home, and come to you. Dick, you *must* go away: leave London—leave England, if possible; it's not fair to stay here, putting temptation in her way."

"That's impossible." He faced her stubbornly. "Good heavens, Emily, don't you see how Rose would interpret it? As a plain admission of guilt!"

"Does it matter what she thinks? I'll make it my business to see she understands; I'll even tell her that you acted on my advice. What good can you do by staying? You can't see the girl——"

"And she never needed me so badly as she does now," he muttered.

"Aren't you confusing 'need' with 'want'?" Lady Emily spoke gently. "Of course she wants you—poor child! But what's the use? My very dear Dick: do try to see this thing straight. Supposing Cynthia were to die: you couldn't marry Kay Timson."

"Why not?" he defied her.

"Because to marry her would be to do her a very grievous wrong. You are old enough to be her father; such marriages are very rarely a success, and they are unfair to both sides."

"That's nonsense, Emily; we both know cases where they have turned out very well indeed."

"Not with men of your type. You're not a dotard, Dick! and you are accustomed to very sophisticated society. That is probably why Kay's simplicity has such charm for you—at present. Oh, dear, why had this wretched thing to happen? I cannot help thinking it need never have been, but for these unsettled times we live in, your own boredom——"

He could not help smiling a little.

"No, Emily; you have it wrong, if you imagine this is a matter of boredom!"

"Then the boredom will come later"—she spoke sharply, for her—"when you have exhausted the charms of Kay's youth, and come to the gulf between her traditions and yours! Seriously, Dick, can you ever have imagined the Timsons down at Verney?"

"I never proposed to take them there," was the cold reply. "I'm grateful for your kindness, Emily, but there are certain subjects on which we must differ, and I would rather not discuss them. I know this is the end for me and Kay, but it can't be left like this. Rose Timson and I have been good friends, and it is right to none of us that she could continue to think of me in the terms of that letter."

"Such violence spends itself. Her bitterness will die down in time."

"And in the meanwhile, Kay is suffering for it. It's no use, Emily; we've got to think of something. I am not inclined to write, and even less to expose myself to the snub of being turned away from her door."

"You would be absolutely wrong to do either! Dear Dick, do acknowledge that your part in this is finished. It has been a disastrous part—let's admit it; you would not, I know, wish to prolong it for the sake of some imaginary salving of your conscience——"

"Good God, Emily, I haven't got a conscience! I've only got love—love for Kay. There must be some way of making it easier for her—something to tell Rose, if the right person

can be found to tell it. I feel it's not fair to involve you; I know you hate the entire business."

"Answer me one question. Have you ever made love to Kay Timson?"

"In fact, no. Verbally, no. So far as looks, tones, gestures are concerned—God in heaven, Emily! You know as well as I do that 'making love' does not consist in the obvious things. With my voice, with my eyes, I must often have 'made love' to Kay. Now are you satisfied?"

"Not 'satisfied.' Dick"—there was sadness in her tone—"but grateful to you for being honest with me. Well . . ." Her hand went out reluctantly to the telephone. "Shall I give Mrs. Timson a ring, and find out if she will see me?"

"One moment. What the devil shall we do if she won't?" asked Richard, with a schoolboy's helplessness. She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know. I have no more taste than you, for being snubbed!"

"Oh—leave it. I won't have you snubbed by Rose."

She smiled, holding the receiver towards him.

"I expect you know her number. Will you get it for me?"

The silent room filled with the distant brr-rr of the instrument; Emily had taken it from his hand.

"It sounds as if no one is in. Ah, here's . . . This is Lady Emily Hope speaking. Could I have a word with Mrs. Timson?"

Richard's nerves had driven him to the other end of the room, where he stood with his hands in his pockets, staring out of the window. The noise of the traffic below drowned the murmur of Emily's voice on the telephone, but he heard the faint *ping* of the bell, as she replaced the receiver.

She was coming towards him; he was too stupefied to notice the deep concern on her face, but he started as she laid her hand on his arm.

"Well?"

"She is still away—in Hampshire. Dick, Kay is very ill. They think it may be meningitis."

Part Three

ROSE

CHAPTER ONE

IT SEEMS a long time since I said anything about Mrs. Carpenter; she was my first Mayfair patient, and we had kept in touch, one way or another, for seven or eight years. Not that massage did her any good; you can't get results when you're up against three square meals a day, about a gallon of liquor, a couple of pounds of chocolates and no exercise. She weighed round about thirteen stone—although I'd persuaded her to have colonics. But massage was her hobby; she would lie there yapping happily, while I pummelled her about—and, sometimes she wouldn't be in a mood for pummelling, and we'd just sit and gossip. She had taken something more than a liking, it was a real affection for me, and I think I know why: I was her kind, not only in ideas, but in background. She had been a country butcher's daughter, she confided to me once; then she got into the chorus at Drury Lane, then she married Mr. Carpenter—who, by the way, had gone off with another woman, but he didn't seem to want her to divorce him, and of course she was much too lazy to bother about it for herself. He had made her a splendid settlement, which she had nearly doubled by clever investments; she was, in fact, one of the richest women I ever knew.

To be perfectly candid, the society she had got into since her marriage was a bit above her, and with me she felt she was down to sweet earth. If I'd been a woman of no principles, I could have made a living out of Mrs. Carpenter, but beyond charging her for every minute of the time I spent with her (which I was obliged to do, or I would have been seriously out of pocket), I never had an unlawful penny out of her. I think she appreciated that, and it helped to build her con-

fidence in me. She gave me some beautiful presents, and she had taken a proper fancy to Jo, whom she met one day when we both happened to be shopping at Jackson's; she sent her a pedigree spaniel puppy, which of course won Jo's heart completely—she was as mad on animals as Laura and I were at her age.

The only thing Mrs. Carpenter suffered from was boredom, and it must have been sheer boredom that led her to stage a nervous breakdown, and get ordered abroad for a change.

"Goodness me!" I said, when she suggested my going with her. "You don't suppose I can leave my work and come gadding off on the Continent with you?"

"Remington says it's that or a nursing home," sniffed Mrs. Carpenter. She was having a bad attack of self-pity, and her face looked like a great, wet strawberry, for she had been crying for hours. But she saw the look in my eye, and caught me a smack on my bottom as I was bending over her. "You needn't think you're going to get me into that racket-shop of yours, either. Honest to God!—Lizzie Minton says it ran her into more than a hundred a week. It's a bit thick, you know, Tim, considering she's one of Remington's oldest patients."

"I suppose she didn't mention she'd got one of the oldest sets of adhesions, either?" I retorted: for Remmy and I were both proud of our job on Lady Minton. "She'd not seen her toes for ten years, and I heard her giving her maid hell the other day for a spot of grease on one of her slippers."

That was the way to talk to Mrs. Carpenter; she started to laugh.

"All right, all right. But look here: I may be a very rich woman, but I'm not going to be cozened into blueing my money on things I get no fun out of. I've got the villa at St. Jean de Luz and a houseful of servants eating their heads off: and why should they? I haven't been out there since before the war; come on, let's go, you and me——"

I shook my head. "Can't be done. Why don't you make up a nice house party and spend a couple of months enjoying yourself, instead of moping about town?"

She gave me a funny sort of look, and hiccupped a sob out of herself before replying.

"Because I'm sick of feeding people and giving them a

good time, and having them sneer at me behind my back. I know plenty of people at Biarritz, and round there; we'll get our parties and bridge and people in for cocktails every day—oh, we shan't want for company when it gets round that the bar's open at Les Oléandres!" I was sorry to hear her speak so bitterly, it was not like Mrs. Carpenter. "Timmy, do come with me," she begged. "I want my massage, and I'm so miserable, and you're the only real friend I've got."

As I worked over the great hunches of flesh at the base of her neck, I was doing some thinking.

As usual, I had the girls on my mind. I'd had a nice packet of trouble with Kathleen at the end of her last term at school. They thought it was meningitis, but I got the best man down from town, and he diagnosed the whole thing as some form of neurasthenia. There had been some other nonsense too, Mr. Somervell had come into it, but I am not going to start about that. I took it seriously, and worked myself into a state, until Lady Emily came down and had a talk with me. That was a great relief; one hates to think ill of friends. But we decided the friendship had better stop for a while, until Kathleen was old enough to have sense, and although I felt annoyed at having to break off a friendship which meant a good deal in my life, for the sake of a piece of schoolgirl silliness, I agreed with Lady Emily it was the only thing to do, in the circumstances. At a matter of fact, I blamed the school for the whole business; Katie had got lessons on the brain, and her poor little head was quite turned, for a while. They wanted me to try psychoanalysis, but I wasn't having anything to do with quackery of that kind.

While I was in the throes of all this, George found me the house I had been wanting, in Sutton. It was modern and bright, with a nice piece of garden, and a cornfield at the back, so we were not built in. I had not time to do more than throw the furniture into it; Mrs. Thesiger—now Lady Solness—let me off the remainder of my Plymouth Street lease; I think she was glad to, for she popped some of her own friends into it and charged them double what she was charging me. The new house had belonged to some people from the Lake district, who called it Silverdale; rather a pretty name, I thought. I bought a kind of divan-hammock thing for the garden, and when Kathleen got over her illness (we had her

in bed nearly four months), she spent most of the day lying out of doors. Poor Katie; she was good. Never complained or argued about anything, and the way she seemed to cling to me was pathetic; as if I was the one thing in her life. But I was terribly worried about the way she did not seem to get back her spirits, even in Jo's holidays. Jo was my comfort, at that time; she made herself into a little slave for her sister, and her good humour and liveliness were like sunbeams about the house. And, of course, she was mad about her spaniel, which she christened Beech, because he was a golden cocker: the prettiest thing, with his fringed paws and long, silken ears. We all loved Beech—Kathleen as well; from the very first he was just like another human member of the family.

"Well, what about it, Tim?" Mrs. Carpenter was asking. I must have been silent for nearly five minutes.

I pulled myself up, with my loins aching from that beastly bed on which Mrs. Carpenter would have her treatment, though I had told her repeatedly it was not fair to ask anybody to do deep massage on such a thing, and she could just as well have got one of the hospital kind and had it in her dressing-room, or somewhere else, if she did not care for the look of it in her own rooms.

"I'll come," I looked her straight in the eye, "if I can fetch the girls as well, and my housekeeper, who looks after Kathleen since she's been ill. I'll want our expenses, for the four of us—and of course my usual fees." It was a fine piece of impudence, but I knew she wanted me, and that the money wasn't anything to her. She had always said she "would like to do something for me," and now I was giving her the chance. To her credit, she took it. She *did* look astonished for a minute—as well she might, at my coolness—then her mouth (she had rather a pretty mouth) curled up at the corners.

"You old pirate! Fetch the whole Zoo, if you like." She blew her nose, stopped blubbering, and looked quite happy. "We'll leave on Monday." It was Friday when she spoke.

"No, we won't," I told her. "I've got to square Remmy and Alice first"—not that I thought they would make much trouble; it had been arranged Alice was to take her holiday in June or July, and I mine in August, to fit in with school holidays; but Alice had not yet made her plans, and I felt sure she would not mind the change over. And of course I had to

get Jo home from The Towers, because this all took place in the middle of the summer term; but I did not mean to stand for any argument from Miss Maitland. As a matter of fact, I had considered removing Jo after Kathleen's trouble; but there were so many other things to worry about, and I felt I could trust Jo not to be bullied into doing more work than she felt like.

I expected the children to be crazy, but Kathleen took me by surprise.

"Oh, Mummy, please, I'd much rather stop at home with Susan!" she begged.

I guessed her illness had made her feel she could not face up to strange places and people, so I just put this quietly aside, remembering the times when every other word was about going abroad and seeing foreign countries and hearing people talk French, and whether it sounded like the French they spoke at school! Children are just little weathercocks; every fresh wind blows them a different way.

"Wait till you see the blue sea and the mimosa Mr. Somervell used to talk about," I told her. Kathleen closed her eyes and shivered, and I realised what a fool I was to mention Mr. Somervell, for it must make her feel self-conscious, though we'd talked things thoroughly out, and I had told her we all understood it was just part of her illness, and nobody would ever give it a thought again.

She had failed her examination, by the way. Of course she did. More fool me, ever to let her take it. And the next thing, if you please, Jo came rambling home at Easter, babbling about having to take school certificate if she meant to be a vet! I soon knocked that notion on the head.

"None of that, my girl! We've had enough school certificate in this family to last us our lifetimes."

It didn't weigh on Jo, of course; nothing ever did. She just grinned at me with her mouth full of toffee and said:

"That's all right, Mummy, I can always be a kennel maid." I thought, all right, she can if she wants to. She had as much of an instinct for animals as her grandfather had.

I may as well say here that before we had been a fortnight at St. Jean de Luz, Kathleen had got over her fancy, and she and Jo were never off the shore: pedalling those water bicycles

and riding rubber horses and throwing each other those big striped balls which Susan bought them at the little shop behind the Casino. As a matter of fact, this was only one of several things that did not turn out exactly as I had expected.

Les Oléandres, Mrs. Carpenter's villa, could not have been lovelier—although it was more like a small palace than my idea (then) of a villa. Coming to it at the end of the long journey (everything as smooth as oil, for we had a courier, and Mrs. Carpenter's maid and Susan had a compartment to themselves) was almost like a fairy tale. It stood on a hillside, in the middle of a grove of trees, with a palm avenue leading up to it, we got there when it was almost dark, in a big white car driven by the French chauffeur Michel, which met us at a station with the funny name of Les Nègresses. There was a terrace from which you looked across the sea, and could see lights of other villas prickling the hill, farther down. It was my first time abroad, and I was enraptured, and expected Kathleen to be the same; but whether the journey had been too much for her, or she was shy among all the foreign surroundings, she would hardly look at anything, and only wanted to go to bed. I thought it was a good idea for both of them, so I packed them off with Susan, and Mrs. Carpenter kindly arranged for trays to be sent to their rooms. I did feel upset when I went up to say good-night, and found Kathleen crying into her pillow as if her heart would break, but I put it down to excitement and to her weakness after her illness, and felt sure things would be all right in the morning.

Dinner, that night, was like something out of a book. The dining-room, to start with, reminded me of photographs in *Harper's Bazaar*: all white, even the carpets, with an oval table of green glass. The candles were black, each one placed in a small separate ring of water-lilies: a very pretty, exotic effect, I thought it, though Mrs. Carpenter kept catching her sleeves in them and cursing. "We won't have these damn' things again!" She spoke to the man who was waiting on us in French, and I saw he was put out, and guessed he had spent a lot of time in arranging them. So when dinner was over and we were leaving the dining-room, I pointed at them and tried out my first bit of French. "*Très joli*," I said—having got Kathleen to help me brush up a sentence or two. The man

fairly beamed. "*Madame est très amiable*," he said, and I felt I was getting on—landing a compliment the first time I opened my mouth in a foreign language!

The most striking thing about the dining-room was the wrought-iron gates that went right across one end of it; I had never seen anything like them *inside* a house before. They might have been park gates, all burnished up. Through them you went down several shallow steps into the salon, which was on the level of the terrace—another white room, all over big satin divans with a fountain in the middle. Mr. Carpenter had brought her here for her honeymoon, she told me, and gave her the whole place as one of her wedding presents. I remembered Harry's wedding present to me: a string of pearls which he said had belonged to his grandmother. I really believed his tale about their being a family heirloom, until I tried to pawn them! I couldn't help laughing; it was so like Harry to have pulled a fast one on me, even on our wedding day.

Knowing Mrs. Carpenter, I guessed (rightly, as it turned out) that we should not be having many evenings to ourselves. I was glad to see her, already quite recovered from her depression, the size of a captive balloon in her white chiffon dinner dress, but as happy as a lark—having forgotten all her bitterness about the people who sponged on her in London, and prepared—I knew all the signs—to have a good time. I felt very gay myself; I was having no expenses, the first really carefree holiday I had had since the children were born, and it cheered me to think of the good it would do Kathleen, and the fun they would both have, here at the villa, and by the sea with Susan.

Well, I was a little disappointed, in the morning, to find we were quite a distance from the sea. Les Oléandres was not really at St. Jean de Luz, as I had understood from Mrs. Carpenter, but about a third of the way between it and Biarritz. To get to the sea we had either to get the autobus which passed the gates of the drive, or take the car, a privilege I should not have cared often to claim. There was, however, a very swell swimming pool in the grounds, so they would not be deprived of their fun in the water.

At the end of three or four days, however, I realised I would have to make a change. As I had expected, we were

inundated with visitors. Mrs. Carpenter spent the whole of the morning after our arrival on the telephone, cars started arriving, and, instead of just the four of us, twenty-two sat down to lunch. The swimming pool was crowded out for the rest of the afternoon, and, although the girls seemed popular enough, I thought I had better get them out of the way. This was only the beginning; more people turned up for cocktails, and I heard Mrs. Carpenter telling her maid to put out her black gown with the strass design on the corsage, as we would be going into Biarritz after dinner. To cut a long story short, for the rest of the time I was there, there were never less than half a dozen cars parked on the sweep in front of the terrace, and sometimes the drive looked like the Mall for a Royal garden party.

We all choose our own friends, and I got on very well with Mrs. Carpenter's; but there is no denying they were a flash lot. Real *rastaquouères*—a word I learnt later—and bad hats, some of them; particularly the women. They were all Madame This and La Duchesse de That and the Princess of What-have-you; but I bet they would have been put to it if any of them had had to produce their marriage lines; or, if they happened to have them, that the names on them would not have been the ones that Gaston, Mrs. Carpenter's butler, called out from the top of the drawing-room stairs. It was no business of mine; I agreed with Mrs. Carpenter that they were a very amusing lot, much more fun than the London set, and they were certainly the smartest crowd I had ever found myself among in my life. They were all either very good-looking or ugly in the way foreign women turn into something much more exciting than beauty; and their clothes were dazzling.

They spent their time harmlessly enough: mainly in gambling—you would have thought they got enough of that, as we were at the Casino practically every night; and, of course, the amount of liquor they put down would have raised the level of the Atlantic if it had all been drained down the hill! I suspected that one or two of them went in for drugs, but that was their affair. They needed something to keep them going at the pace they had started.

But a day or two after all this blew up, I happened to be at my window, which overlooked the swimming pool, and I saw some goings-on that didn't exactly please me, with

Kathleen and Jo shrieking and splashing in the middle of it all. I had already had to speak once or twice, about people slipping the children cocktails on the sly, and I had actually caught Kathleen smoking a cigarette, in a style that showed it was not the first by a long way. She always picked up things like a little parrot, and I saw her putting on a sophisticated manner, and, several times, laughing at jokes which I knew she could not possibly understand; but other people thought she did, of course, and I caught some amused looks that were not very flattering, either to me or to Kathleen. I called to Susan, who happened to be in the room behind me, pressing out one of the children's frocks.

"That won't do, will it?"

Susan came to stand beside me on the balcony; she watched for a moment, then nodded slowly.

"There's the din, as well. Kathleen never gets her afternoon rest, and look at last night!" About a dozen people had come back with us from Biarritz, and, to use an old expression, "the rafters dirled" until four or five in the morning. I knew Kathleen, who woke if you dropped a pin, could not have slept, although Jo, the little pig, would snore through a bombardment.

It was really very awkward, and I could not say anything to Mrs. Carpenter, as it was I who had made a point of bringing the girls, and nothing could have been kinder than the fuss she made of them—especially her favourite, Jo. If the child had not had a cast-iron inside, she would have been killed by the sweets that were stuffed into her; as it was, unless I was mistaken, Jo was blowing up for a first-rate bilious attack, and Kathleen was green for want of rest and sleep.

"Leave it to me," said Susan suddenly. "I'll fix it."

I should put in that Susan had the greatest gift for getting on in a foreign language of any one I ever met. She did not know a syllable of French, and she never shouted, like many English people do when they talk to foreigners; but she made herself understood without, apparently, any trouble. I suppose she had had practice with Lady Cynthia.

"You won't be needing me this afternoon, Mrs. Timson?" she said. "I think I'll catch the three o'clock bus and go down to the town." The town, for Susan, was St. Jean de Luz; she

always said "Biarritz" with a kind of sniff, as if it left a bad smell under her nose.

"All right, Susan," I said. We had drawn much closer together, since Kathleen's illness. I always felt, up to then, she only stopped with me for the sake of Mr. Somervell. It made me a bit off-hand in dealing with her; I don't care for patronage, especially not from people who work for me. But she had been wonderful with Kathleen, and I knew that, if Susan took the matter in hand, everything would be put right.

When she came back, it was all fixed. She had found a little hotel on the promenade: the kind of hotel English people don't know about, where the French go, as they say, "*en famille*." Goodness knows how she made them understand her; but she had arranged for a room for the girls with one opening out of it for herself; she had got the term *en pension* written down, and, even in francs, they looked a fleabite in comparison with what I paid for the four of us at Rhyl and such places during the usual holidays.

I had to put it very tactfully to Mrs. Carpenter: that the girls were really in the way, that it made grown-up people uncomfortable to have children always around. At first she would not hear of it, but it ended in her insisting on paying the bill for the three of them. "After all, Tim, I proposed I'd have them at the villa." I realised she would have felt uncomfortable if I had refused, and off they went, in the white car, with Susan, that very afternoon: Kathleen not so pleased as Jo. for, as I had seen, she was getting a taste for the gay life up at the villa.

I then had to plan my day so as to do the fair thing by everybody. I spent the morning with Mrs. Carpenter, and gave her her massage. I had lunch at Les Oléandres, and I let her send me down to the town in the car, because she never used it in the early afternoon, and it did that lazy beast Jules no harm to have an extra journey. I spent the afternoon with the girls, and was back at the villa in time to change and have cocktails.

We used to spend our time on the sands, and then go back to the hotel, where they made themselves smart for tea. Then we strolled into the town, looking at the shops: lovely clothes and modern jewellery. I spent quite a lot of money, for I had been very lucky at the tables; playing every night, I seemed

to have an instinct for it. I would follow *rouge* for an hour, making on every round, then for no reason, I'd change, and *noir* would come up as if I'd called it! Quite a lot of the gamblers used to follow me, and I was more than two hundred pounds in pocket, which, as I always gambled in small stakes, was good. I looked on the money as a windfall I could spend on the girls. Kathleen was seventeen: an age when they love bits of jewellery and fancy oddments. It was harder to find things for Jo, but, bless the child—she never cared. "Never mind me, Mummy; I don't want any dress-up things. Get something for Kay." She had a heart of gold.

After tea, we generally strolled back along the promenade and over the headland, to watch the waves dashing on the breakwater; it made me shudder, but they loved it. Then we went back to the hotel. Or we went across to the old town, that they call Ciboure, and watched the fishing boats come in. Then, as a rule, I sent them back with Susan, and sometimes had a cocktail before I picked up my taxi for the villa.

I liked St. Jean de Luz, and agreed with Susan that it was a better place for the children; it hadn't the vicious element of Biarritz, and the bathing was safer. I liked the long, open front, and the little casino, which did not seem a kind of fascinating monster, like the one at Biarritz, but a funny little doll's house, built for grown-up children. It had no records of suicides, or nasty histories that sent a creepy feeling through your hair when you walked into the rooms. And I was glad to have them away from the feverish—although well-meaning—atmosphere of the villa, where they could not help hearing a lot of things they were better without.

Just before you got to the casino, there used to be a little bar, where I often had my cocktail; you only had to step round the corner for a taxi, and it faced towards the sunset, which is always lovely at St. Jean. The people there were young and healthy, jolly boys and girls—not like the crowd I was going back to at Les Oléandres. To tell the truth, I was beginning to get a bit tired of them; that sort of vice is amusing, to begin with, as a spectacle, but when it never varies, or shows any sort of originality or invention, the monotony begins to get you down.

It was only a couple of nights before we came home, and I had been telling Susan about the packing, when I stepped into

this little bar and ordered my usual Martini. It was rather early for the usual customers, and the only person besides me was a man I had noticed once or twice in my walks along the promenade.

I am not good at descriptions, but for once I am going to try and make a picture in words of Dr. Lavigne. That is not his proper name; it would not do for me to put down the real one, for it was famous all over the Continent, as well as in France and England, and although he is dead now, I don't want to cause trouble or embarrassment, as I might do, if his name were linked with mine. Let me say straight away there was never a shadow of an *affaire* between us, and that our relationship, while it lasted, was conducted on the strictest lines that English professional etiquette—I don't know anything about the French variety—would approve.

He sat in an angle of the window and wall, just across from me, with the light falling on his face. It was one of those small-boned, sallow faces common among Frenchmen, which I do not admire as a rule; and he had a little pointed beard and moustache very like the cartoons of "Monsieur Crapaud" in old magazines. He was, in fact, what I should have called a typical Frenchman, except he had not got that sexy self-consciousness that seems to come over any Frenchman when he looks at any woman between the ages of seventeen and seventy—unless she has got a squint and pigeon toes. He had heavy-lidded eyes, but they were not sensual; they gave one the idea that he had looked upon so many disappointing and saddening things that his soul was tired with them. I know that sounds romantic, but I give my word I never had a romantic thought about Dr. Lavigne during the short time I knew him; and the more I knew, the more he inspired in me a respect I have never known for any other man—except in a different way, for Mr. Somervell. There was a neat, fastidious sort of thing about him; he made one feel that one must be very clean and particular about one's person, whenever he came near one. He had rather a high, square brow, and—really, that's all I remember: except that, sitting opposite him in the bar, I noticed he used his left hand for his glass, and that the right hand lay on his knee, with a glove on. I got the idea that he had injured it in some way.

I think all this shows that I was interested in Dr. Lavigne; but if any one had told me that, sitting there, watching him, not too openly, for fear of seeming flirtatious, there in the light of the sunset, I was watching my own fate, I would have laughed the idea to ridicule.

Well, I am a friendly sort of person, and, as we were by ourselves, except for the barman, polishing his glasses at the other end of the room, it did not seem natural, not to speak. I tried out my sentence in a whisper, then I said it aloud, jerking my head towards the window, to make sure my meaning was clear.

"*Belle couche de soleil, monsieur*"—a beautiful couch of the sun; otherwise, a pretty sunset.

He smiled, and, to my relief, for I knew I couldn't keep this up, answered me in English. I wondered if my French sounded as funny as his English; but he had a perfect command of the language, and, apart from the accent, he never made a slip.

"We have beautiful sunsets on this coast, *madame*."

"You're a native, I suppose?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "No. I am only here, like yourself, on holiday. *Madame* is, no doubt, staying at one of the hotels." He did not say it snoopily, like somebody trying to make a pick-up, but with a sort of polite indifference—making conversation.

"As a matter of fact, I'm stopping at Les Oléandres; I expect you know Mrs. Carpenter," I answered, knowing that practically everybody in these parts, whether native or visitors, knew the villa.

"Ah, an *anglaise*, is it not? I have not the honour to know Madame Carpenter, but I have met some of her friends. Am I permitted to offer *madame* an *apéritif*?"

I had not noticed my glass was empty, and now I looked rather hurriedly at my watch. I did not want to be late, and put Mrs. Carpenter out, as I knew she liked me to be there at cocktail time—I never knew why, as her guests were more than capable of looking after themselves. But I only had two more nights before I left, so I was anxious to do the right thing. At the same time I felt interested in my companion, and reluctant to cut the meeting short before I had learned a little more of him.

"It will have to be a quick one," I said. "These local chauffeurs go into slow motion at the sight of our hill!"

He beckoned—still with his left hand—to the barman, who came over and collected our glasses.

"*Madame* will allow me to join her at her table?"

He sat down on the padded leather bench beside me. You generally feel a seat "give" when someone sits down, but he was so light that unless I had been looking at him I would not have known he was there. Like most Frenchmen he was short, about the same height as I, and very slight in proportion.

We chatted away easily enough; it appeared he had noticed me with the girls. He asked about them and their ages, and how we had enjoyed our holiday in St. Jean de Luz.

"For myself, I prefer this *Côte d'Argent* to the *Côte d'Azur*," he told me. "No doubt *madame* knows the South of France well."

"No, I don't," I corrected him. "This is my first visit to France, but I don't mean it to be the last. Next time I hope I'll see Paris, and Monte Carlo, and a bit of Provence—but I'll have to earn some more money before I do that!"

This seemed to catch his attention.

"*Alors, madame est femme d'affaires?*" He had to translate that for me.

"A business woman? Yes. I'm a masseuse," I told him.

I might almost have put a shot into him. His rather slack, indifferent manner vanished—although he did not change his position; and I felt that, for the first time, I had got his full attention.

"*C'est curieux,*" I heard him murmur. "Will *madame* permit me to ask a favour? Will you show me your hands?"

I stripped off my gloves and laid my hands on the edge of the table. He bent over to look at them so closely, that I could actually feel his breath on my knuckles.

"*Formidable. . .* How long have you practised, *madame?*"

I told him the number of years, and he continued to look at my hands as though he had never seen any like them before. I almost began to feel as if there was something the matter with them—some sort of deformity! I was just going to move them, when he suddenly looked up at me.

"*Madame*, will you do me the honour of dining with me

to-morrow night? One moment; please do not accuse me of impertinence. Here is my card." He passed it to me, still with his left hand, and I read *Dr. Pierre Lavigne*—it was not the name—and an address in, of all places, Orléans. I knew about Joan of Arc, of course, but Orléans, to me, was just one of those places that don't happen, outside the history books.

I have often wondered, since, what he must have thought of my blank look, when I lifted my eyes from his card. I don't suppose he had ever met any one so ignorant in his life.

"Oh, you're a doctor."

"Yes, *madame*, I am a doctor." He did not even smile as he said it. "Perhaps that explains to you my interest in your hands. *Je vous en prie!*" I had picked up my gloves again—"Leave them there. It is not often that one has the—opportunity to look upon such a pair of hands."

I began to feel embarrassed.

"I don't see anything special about them——"

This time he smiled.

"Is there not a saying in your country, *madame*—'Familiarity——'?"

"Breeds contempt," I finished it for him.

"Contempt—for such hands . . ." It seemed to shock him.

"Well, I've found them useful; but it certainly never struck me they were particularly beautiful," I admitted.

"Beautiful? Who speaks of beauty?" He sounded quite cross. Then he seemed to recover himself. "It is not usual, I know, to ask a lady to whom one has not been introduced to dine with one; it is, if I may say so, a compliment I would only venture to pay to an Englishwoman!"

"Well, I always thought Frenchwomen were supposed to be—well—gayer than we are." I was playing for time.

"Perhaps one is not always looking for gaiety? Perhaps *madame* may have a different conception of the French, after—*Pardon!*" But his eyes were glistening with triumph. I had pulled my hands back off the table; I felt things were moving too fast. "I did not touch them. *Parole d'honneur, madame*, I did not take the liberty of touching your hands!"

"But I distinctly felt——" I stammered. I felt like a silly girl of sixteen, but the sensation which had run through my fingers had now put me thoroughly on my guard.

"A moment. Close your eyes."

I hesitated, then I did so.

"Now put your hands back on the table."

After a moment, I obeyed. Almost instantly I felt in my fingertips a sensation as if someone was touching them with a small feather. The feather was not stiff, but very soft and vibrant, as if it were still on the body of a living bird.

"Open your eyes."

I did so.

"Now look."

His left hand was lying on the table, the tips of the fingers pointing towards mine. But they were not touching. They were very close, but you could have slid a thick piece of paper between them, and our fingers would have cleared the paper on either side. He moved his hand away, and I no longer felt the sensation; he replaced it in the same position, and again I felt the tiny electric quiver enter my fingers.

Now I was suspicious, and on the look-out for funny business. I suppose my expression gave me away, for he said:

"It is not at all uncanny, *madame*—or anything that science does not explain. It is as I had imagined: that the nerves in those thick, padded fingers of yours—particularly in the right hand, which is odd, for that is usually the less sensitive of the two—are abnormally developed; you would find that out, if you ever became blind. Your right hand might serve you as a cat's whiskers serve it in the dark; it would warn you of the proximity of objects, before you touched them. My left hand, you will observe, is not unlike yours. Such hands, as you have no doubt discovered, *madame*, may mean a fortune to the *masseur*."

"You've hurt your right one, haven't you?"

He seemed to stiffen.

"A sprain. I do a little manipulation, now and again—although it is not, as you see from my degree, my subject." I knew nothing about foreign degrees, and felt I might as well hide my ignorance, so I nodded. "It would give me great pleasure, *madame*, to talk with you; to discuss with you the range and the possibilities of your work. This, I give you my word, is my only motive in asking you to dine with me. Pray do me the honour of believing it, and give me a single evening to relieve the boredom—for an invalid—of this charming St. Jean de Luz!"

My mind caught at the word "invalid," and, giving him another look, at closer quarters, it struck me that the sallow pallor was not, as I had taken it to be, natural; he looked like a man who had recently come through a bad illness, from which he had not yet quite recovered. He was also much older than I had taken him to be, across the corner of the room, or his looks belied him. In spite of his dapper figure, and the unstreaked darkness of his hair and beard, he was a man of sixty at least, although in a kinder light, and from a short distance, he might have passed for forty-eight or fifty.

Well, I did not know how it was to be managed, or how Mrs. Carpenter would take it; but my curiosity was roused, and I meant to accept this invitation. I said I would be at the restaurant which I had already heard of as the best eating-place in St. Jean at eight o'clock the following night—and I told the taxi man to drive like the devil to Les Orléandres.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEWSPAPERS, having nothing better on hand in the "Silly Season," were making a great splash of a Society divorce case. I was sorry for the duke, because the people concerned were his son and his daughter-in-law, and a young lad of a Guards officer—a boy I knew quite well by sight, being a fairly regular patron of Flora's. As one can imagine, there was a lot of gossip, each person claiming to know a bit more than the last, and the family name was pretty well muddied-up by the time they had done with it. It was a long time before I saw the duke, who kept away from Flora's—for which I didn't blame him. Flora's brand of sympathy was a bit too bracing for anybody who was feeling sore, and I felt pretty sure he was taking it to heart. The funny thing was that, although the duke was perhaps a bit of a rip on the side, he had great dignity and pride of family, and one could see that, for all his fun and games, he would never have entertained anything that meant blotting the escutcheon. Well, according to the scandalmongers, the escutcheon was now blotted, good and proper, and by the person he loved, next to his own son, best in the world.

I *was* sorry for him; so sorry, that on the evening I ran into him on Mount Street, and he asked me to come and have a bit of food with him—although I'd told the girls I would be home early, and take them to the pictures, I rang up and said I had been detained, and we would have to make it another evening.

As it happened, it was one of the restaurant's "smart" evenings, and when we went in, and the duke was recognised, there was first a buzz and then a silence you could have heard a pin drop in. I saw him turn crimson up to the roots of his hair, and his back stiffen, and he turned round sharply and walked past me, straight back through the door. He spoke to one of the people in the hall, and then he beckoned to me.

"I hope you won't mind, Rose, we're having a private room. I'm damned if I'll provide a tuppenny gaff for those gaping fools in there!"

I sympathised with him, although I knew it was partly his own fault. According to the tales, he had gone blustering about, swearing up to the last minute that there wasn't a word of truth in the stories about his son's affairs, that he would knock anybody down who said a word against his daughter-in-law—poor old dear, he had asked for it. He had built up what would have been a commonplace enough divorce into a regular three-volume family saga, and I suppose people were not to be blamed for getting all the fun they could out of it.

When we were alone, I said something about being sorry about his trouble.

"It does seem a tragedy—after so happy a time," I added—for the marriage had only taken place between three and four years ago.

"It's a dam' sight more of a tragedy than you know, Rose," he told me. He looked shockingly older, and it struck me it was the first time I had seen the duke really as *himself*. At Flora's he was always buffooning and joking like the rest of them, and on the few occasions when we had been alone, he was too busy trying to undermine my virtue (as he called it) for me to be able to guess what he was like in ordinary intercourse with other people. But to-night he was just a tired, middle-aged man, discouraged, disappointed, and, above all, deeply disgusted with the publicity which, for the last week or two, had surrounded him and his family. Ordinarily,

he was a bit jaunty and horsey looking—nothing aristocratic about him; as a matter of fact, I had often laughed to think what he would look like in his robes and coronet. But to-night, for some odd reason, they would have fitted him; short though he was, and with his little clipped moustache and all, he would have worn them with a sort of sorrowful dignity, that I could not help feeling, although I had never seen him dressed up for the opening of Parliament or for any great occasion.

"It's more of a tragedy than you know," he repeated, not taking the least interest in the menu the waiter had placed beside him. "What's more, it's killing the girl, and it'll ruin Cash"—I knew he meant his son, Viscount Cassiobury. "Isn't it awful?—Rose, isn't it god-damned awful?" He spoke like a puzzled child, and I could fairly have hugged him; sometimes there seems to be nothing for it, but to take somebody in your arms.

"Why don't you tell me about it?"—I thought it might make him feel better, to talk.

"Why? You read your papers, don't you?"—He glared at me.

"Oh, papers! Who takes any notice of papers?"—I shrugged my shoulders, and he made a noise that was meant for a laugh.

"About ten million people, I should say!—Every one of those sods down there"—he pointed through the floor. "It's what they feed on, isn't it?—The break-up of two decent young people's marriage, and the stink of a name like ours!—Rose," he said, after a while, "do you know—they adore each other?"

"That's what one always heard."

"Oh! So they make a song of that, do they?—as well as the other?"

We were interrupted by the waiter, and the duke gave the order and we were silent for quite a while. "I'll tell you what happened," he began, after the man had gone again.

"You're a sensible woman; you can hold your tongue. I've got to talk to somebody, or I'll go dotty.—It was Cash's fault, of course; he knows it. He would cut off his right hand for Perdita—but there you are; these things happen. You know he was ordered out East, and there was a Mrs.—what do names

matter? I suppose Cash is an attractive fellow; the women are always after him, but he's never been interested, since he married Per. He may have felt a bit lonely, or this Mrs. Thing was clever. He swears it didn't last a week. Anyhow, some busybody comes home, and tells Per.

"Of course, you don't know Per. She's a lovely girl, a darling; and she seems to have fallen in love with Cash, practically in her cradle. Constancy's supposed to be out of fashion, but I'd take my oath she'll love him until she dies. On my soul, I've never seen such a pair. All Per did and all Cash did was perfect—according to each other; they never had a wry word, or a difference of opinion, from the day they got married. We used to make a joke of it—God forgive us. The only thing that ever troubled them was they hadn't managed to have a child. Four years seems a long time, when you're in love like that, and impatient. They were both perfectly healthy; it seemed funny.

"Then Per gets this news."

He stopped; he had forgotten about the food on his plate, and his face was sagging, like an old man's. It was as if he was asking me to comfort him, and yet was ashamed.

"Being a woman, perhaps you'll understand this better than we do. Per's an odd girl, in some ways; very reserved, very shy. Never makes confidantes. Never tells you if she's hurt or pleased about anything. You have to guess. Cash seemed to be pretty good at the guessing. They understood each other; it was part of their loving. She must have been suffering like hell. But, being Per, she never showed it. Of course."

"I suppose that's where Captain Locke came along," I ventured.

"Well, he didn't 'come along.'" The duke was frowning. "They had known each other from childhood—like Per and Cash. It was an open secret he has asked her to marry him, and that she turned him down for our boy. The three of them had gone on being friends, and young Locke was in and out of the house, whenever Cash was at home, like one of the family. He used to look Per up fairly often after Cash went abroad, and the pair of them used to go out dancing. I expect people gossiped, but all her friends knew Per.

"Now, I'll tell you an extraordinary thing. Everybody is

loading the blame on Locke, and that's how it should be. But it was Per's doing."

This certainly was a departure from the common story.

"You're a woman," he said miserably. "Probably you know how a woman's heart goes when it breaks. Per's heart was broken, so she asks Locke to pop into bed with her. Go on! Explain that—explain that!" he growled to me, and I shook my head, for, of course, I hadn't any explanation. It was not the way I would have acted myself; but what had that to do with it? You can't interpret a person's feelings by the feelings of somebody else.

"Well, when she comes to her senses—the damage is done. Did you ever hear anything like it?—She and Cash, who adore each other, can't produce a child for four years; a fellow who doesn't mean as much to her as the tip of my little finger puts her in the family way at one go. It's preposterous!" fumed the duke. "It's unfair to everybody! It's the damndest, cruellest trick that was ever played on a pair of people who loved each other! They both did wrong, but, my God, how many of us are doing wrong every day, and getting away with it?—While poor Cash and poor little Per are stuck up for every guttersnipe to throw his mud against. And even that one might put up with," he muttered—"though we've not had much of it in the family—if there was the smallest chance of their getting back their happiness——"

"But surely something could have been done about it?—Why, things like that are happening every day, and it never comes out," I could not help saying.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It was left too long, and how does one know it wouldn't have been bungled? Per's a delicate girl; she was nearly out of her mind, in any case, and—the damnable way they do things over here—the shock might have finished it.—Well, there you are; that's the truth of the story—and I don't mind saying it's been a relief to talk it out with you. My wife won't hear it mentioned, and Cash and I are sick of each other's faces. He's going abroad again, now the divorce is over——"

"Poor things; it's one of the saddest stories I've heard. What's going to happen to Lady Cassiobury?" I asked presently.

"Oh, Per'll die." He said it as if it was to be taken for granted. "You can see it, written all over her. A nature like hers never gets over that sort of thing."

"But surely—she's got the baby to live for!"

"She hasn't got Cash to live for. That's all that matters to Per."

"It seems a pity—Had there got to be the divorce?"

"We thought it over from all sides. You see—Per had made it impossible, really. She had lost her head, and the whole town was roaring with it. In his position, you could hardly expect Cash to play the *mari complaisant*—as he might have done, if there had been the least hope of hushing the matter up. He'll have to marry again, of course, and get an heir; it's damned hard luck on him, for he'll never get over Per. I tell you, there are times I could blast the laws of this country to hell. . . ."

All my friends seemed to have been getting themselves into trouble while I was out of England. There was Remmy, if you please, getting himself into a car smash that put him into bed for three weeks; I would have gone to see him immediately on my return, but I gathered from Alice that female visitors were not exactly made welcome by Mrs. Remington! I had already come to the conclusion that she was a fool of a woman, but perhaps she knew her Remmy. It had struck me before now that he had a bit of a wandering eye, but as I had nothing to complain of, it was nothing to do with me. One thing I was sure of: that he had too much good sense to risk his position for the sake of the greatest Venus on earth. Alice, of course, as matron of his nursing home, was bound to see him daily, but she said that not even she got a chance of *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Remington around. I have often wondered if women of this kind know what fools they make their husbands look. Anyhow, it was a plain case of the hand that held the purse-strings ruling the roost, so, although he sent me a message or two, and hoped I had had a good holiday, I had been back more than a fortnight before I set eyes on Remmy.

We were alone in Alice's room at the nursing home. I was treating five special cases of Remmy's, and it was gruelling work. I was not fit for anything by the end of the afternoon. Remmy had just done his round and was having a glass of

sherry, and we had had a hearty laugh over the bandage he still wore round his head, which made him look like one of the pirates from *Peter Pan*.

"Well, what did you make of Les Oléandres?"

I told him they were a pretty hot lot, and I had enjoyed it. I showed him a very handsome handbag I had bought in St. Jean de Luz—the one I happened to be carrying on the evening I dined with Dr. Lavigne. I never could bear those finikin bits of bags, made out of velvet or fancy needlework, women carry in the evenings; and this one, although it was made of suède leather, was quite smart enough to go with an evening dress. I had it with me because I was going on to a cocktail party from the nursing home, so I aired it to Remmy, and he took it, and, of course, examined it all over, inside and out—even having the impudence to go through the pockets. One of the pleasant things about Remmy was the interest he took in women's gadgets. And, in one of the pockets, of course, he had to find Dr. Lavigne's card.

The effect of that card on Remmy was very much like the effect of my hands on Dr. Lavigne—only more so. He looked, for a moment, as if I had shot him out of his skin.

"Where on earth did you get that?"

"He gave it to me. We met at St. Jean."

"You . . . would." He stood staring, first at the card and then at me, chewing the corner of his lip, as if he wanted to say something and did not quite know how to begin. "Well?" he barked at me.

"Well what?—I liked him very much. He took me out to dinner one night."

"Oh, did he? And what did you talk about?"

I took a quick look at Remmy. This couldn't, by any chance, be jealousy? The very idea was absurd. But it was plain his interest was sharper than I had expected, and that something was cooking, behind his short, dry manner.

"Well, let me see.—We talked about my work, mainly. He seemed to think a lot of hand massage; said its possibilities had not been fully exploited. He got me to describe some of my cases, and we discussed the results. From the way he talked, it was easy to see he knew a lot about it. I told him"—I remembered something, and began to laugh.

"Joke?" said Remmy, I thought rather sourly.

"My hands!—Yes, it takes a Frenchman to notice my hands"—for once I preened myself. "I suppose you've never even noticed my hands, Remmy?" He positively sneered, while I spread them out and looked at them. "They're big, but they're quite good-looking hands in their way." I had taken the greatest care of them since Alice made me wear indiarubber gloves in the house, and, without vanity, the nails were beautiful.

"When you've finished admiring yourself, perhaps we might get on to something interesting!"

But his slighting manner had just roused the devil in me.

"That's where you're wrong, and Dr. Lavigne was right. Nothing's so interesting to a woman as talking about herself," I threw at him.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Lavigne's admiration had not, on the night of the dinner, stopped at my hands. I had never had so many compliments paid me in my life—and, what fascinated me as much as the compliments, was his way of paying them: almost coldly, almost as though he were making a diagnosis—not in the least as if I was a woman of flesh and blood, sitting there, feeling at my best in a new frock and enjoying my dinner! I was told I was admirably healthy—which I knew, that I gave off a feeling of wholesomeness—which I was pleased to hear. That my mental balance was admirable, and that I was evidently a woman of great strength of character, power and discretion! Not very flowery compliments, perhaps, but they were good enough to put me in conceit with myself, and to make me feel I was satisfying my companion.

By the time I had run a few of these off to Remmy, he was thoroughly disgusted, and looking for his case. I relented.

"It's all right; he wasn't making a pass at me." Though why should Remmy mind if he were, considering that he, Remmy, with all his opportunities, had never done anything but pull my leg and be rude to me in a joking fashion? "Have you ever tried tactile experiments?" I asked innocently, and pretended not to notice that he had looked round quickly, and was paying attention to every word I said. "You

shut your eyes and describe things by feeling them. Bits of paper: rough or smooth? *How* smooth? Like satin or like ivory? How smooth is ivory?—and which is the colder, ivory or celluloid? A handkerchief: is it linen or cambric?—Silly things like that. A sort of game. We played it after dinner, over coffee."

"What else?"

"Oh, nothing. Except"—I paused to remember—"he said I had a more acute sense of touch than any he had come across, except his own. He said he'd have liked to have done some other tests with me——"

"H'm," said Remmy, sceptically.

"—and he said, if I would ever like to—now, how did he put it?—'extend the scope of my experience,' he would be glad to help me," I concluded.

"*What!*"—Remmy's roar made me jump.

"Well, what about it?—I don't live in Orléans."

"You great, ignorant—jackass of a woman!"

When I had got my wind back—for a moment I had honestly thought he was going to knock me down!—I answered back with spirit.

"Good lord, Remmy, I don't even know if the man was serious! I don't suppose he was, for a minute.—Although he was sober enough," I added, as an afterthought. "We had a bottle of wine and some brandy, but he never touched anything but Vichy water from beginning to end of dinner. He struck me as a bad life; I wouldn't give him much more than another couple of years."

"Rose Timson, you're the biggest blazing fool I ever met among your sex." I remained calm, and waited for him to cool down. "The very idea of a woman in your profession not knowing the name of—Did you mention this to Logan?" he turned on me to ask.

"Yes—now you come to mention it, I did." I also remembered, now, that Alice had given me rather a funny look and changed the subject.

"What did she say?"

"Nothing." He gave a short laugh. "Well, Remmy, I admit it's a pity I'm not more up in things, as you say; but who is this Dr. Lavigne?"

He took two or three turns up and down the big room,

then he came and gripped me by the shoulders; a couple of nice bruises I found, when I undressed that night.

"Now listen to me. You are going to sit down to-night and write to Lavigne that you are coming to see him. Tell him, if you like, that I'm sending you. . . . No." He pulled himself up. "Don't put that in a letter. You understand? Don't put it in a letter."

"It looks as if you're the fool, not me." I turned on him roundly. "Have you lost your wits, Remmy? I've just taken nearly a month's holiday. I can't afford to play ducks and drakes with a connection like mine, and I must say I'm astonished at you for suggesting it."

"Sit down, you stupid woman." He pushed me into a chair. "And stop arguing! You're going to Orléans if I have you kidnapped and taken there. If you need funds—as I expect you do—I'll finance you: on a condition. Nobody knows where you're going, and nobody knows about—this." He had Dr. Lavigne's card in his hand; he lifted it towards his eyes, read it once more and held it against a bar of the electric stove. It lit, and the little black flake dropped on the tiles of the hearth. He scribbled something on a leaf torn from his notebook, and gave it to me; it was the address, without the name.

"Is this an Agatha Christie novel, or what?" I asked feebly.

"Keep that until you know it by heart, then destroy it. And you're going to—Paris will do as well as anywhere; you're going with some eccentric woman you once massaged in London, who's paying you three times your fee because she likes the shape of your nose!"—I knew Remmy's line of persiflage; he often told me to my face I was a charlatan, and only got on by my impudence, but he would not have let me lay a finger on any of his cases, unless he had known I was to be trusted.

I thought for a moment, and then I shook my head.

"I'm not buying it, Remmy. What sort of a name do you think I'd get with my old customers, if I turned them down for somebody who pays better?"

"Oh, make up your own tale; I don't doubt you're a better one at it than I."

"No. Frankly I can't afford it. Whatever I learn from Dr. Lavigne, I can't make that much extra profit out of it. I've

already touched top prices; people won't pay more than I'm asking for my line of work. And I can't work longer hours; that's definite. I'm not so young as I was, Remmy."

"You . . . idiot," said Remmy. "Don't you understand that if you go to Lavigne, you can make as much in an hour as you're getting now for a fortnight's work?" I felt myself gape at that. "I don't suppose he ever made such an offer before; I've heard of people offering him thousands, to be taught his—method: he's turned everybody down. And he comes to you! Of course, if he's as sick a man as you say, that helps to explain it. I don't suppose he intends to carry his secret to the grave,—as they put it! If you throw your chance away," he almost hissed at me, "you don't deserve to earn another penny in your life."

Then he told me.

When I got back to Sutton, Kathleen met me at the door.

"Susan's gone to bed, Mummy. She says it's a headache, but it looks more to me as if she's been crying."

This did not sound like Susan. I went up to her room, and tried the door, which was locked. She came and opened it at once. She had not gone to bed, as Kathleen said, but she had been lying down, for the covers were rumpled, and her hair untidy and unpinned. The curtains were partly drawn, so I could not see much of her face, but I thought it looked swollen and flushed, like after a bout of crying.

"Oh, Mrs. Timson! I didn't mean you to find me here when you came in—I'm sorry. My clock must have stopped." It had, on the little night table by her bed. "I'll get dinner on in a minute."

"What's the matter, Susan? What's happened?"

She hesitated a moment, then she opened one of her drawers and handed me a copy of *The Times*, folded back at the Births, Marriages and Deaths columns. I read where she pointed.

"SOMERVELL.—On June 11th, 1919, after a long illness, Lady Cynthia Somervell, aged 37, daughter of the late Earl and Countess of BREDON, and wife of RICHARD SOMERVELL, of Verney Court, Huntingdon. Funeral private."

So bald and bare; it caught me by the throat. I thought, they might have given you a bit of verse, or a nice little line to show that somebody cared. And then I realised Susan, standing there, as usual, like a graven image, making noises as if she had got a plum stone in her throat—yes, Susan cared. It was funny how one forgot she had been Lady Cynthia's maid; never a word or a mention since she came to us—except that one time, when I spoke to her about Kathleen. I was not one to ask, and although I sometimes felt a curiosity to know what Mr. Somervell's wife had been like, I knew Susan better than to invite a snub. Loyal and silent to the last—that was Susan.

"Well, I'm sure it must be a happy release." I handed the paper back to her. "You were very fond of her, weren't you?"

She stood there, looking at me, stiffly.

"They called her wild and wicked, Mrs. Timson. It wasn't that. When she did wild things, it was because she was driven desperate."

"Was that why she left Mr. Somervell?"—I must have sounded surprised, for, on the face of things, there wasn't anything about Mr. Somervell to drive a woman to desperation.

"Yes, Mrs. Timson." She said it in a final sort of way, like a person who has had to hide the truth for many years, and is glad to speak it at last. "She was desperate. *Desperate with herself.*

"She spent her life looking for perfection. Sometimes she thought she had found it, and she was happy like a singing bird! Then something went wrong. She could not bear the wickedness and evil that seemed to gather round her: lies, unkindness, treachery, deceitfulness, malice. She always started by trusting people, and when she found she was mistaken, she was like a wild thing, dashing everywhere to escape. Those were terrible times: ruin, ruin everywhere. When they were over, she was horrified. Particularly at the harm she'd done Mr. Somervell. She said he was an angel. She would lie on her bed, crying for hours. 'I'm killing him, killing him, Susan!'—I've heard her say that over and over again, as if her heart would break. It broke mine to hear her. She had begun to believe she was wicked all through. 'I'm bad, Susan, I'm bad, and that's why so many bad things happen around me!'

"That's why she went away, Mrs. Timson—and why I had to go with her."

I felt puzzled, for what seemed to be so clear to Susan was not at all clear to me. I had certainly understood Mr. Somervell to say his wife had gone away with a lover. But the look on Susan's face told me she had said as much as she meant to say, so I told her to tidy herself, and went down to the garden. As I tied up some carnations that were flopping over, I thought how odd it was that Susan, for all her simplicity, should understand somebody like Lady Cynthia; I thought that the world seemed very full of unhappiness that was difficult to explain, and I thought about poor little Lady Cassiobury—probably Susan would understand her as well. And then I started to think of Remmy, and the things he had told me that afternoon.

CHAPTER THREE

REMMY kept plaguing me for my decision, but I did not mean to be jumped over it. I realised that I was up against the most serious—I almost wrote the most desperate, and I think that's the better description—moment in my life; I was, as they say, "at the crossroads," one of which, if I took it, was going to lead to a future which even my most ambitious dreams, up to that time, had never contemplated; while the others would keep us jogging along, always on the right side of poverty, of course, but with plenty of anxiety and always a certain feeling of having set a pace, and having to keep to it—which, to tell the truth, I was getting tired of doing. I had had a glimpse, at St. Jean de Luz, of what it meant to live without ever considering money; and although the career Remmy was so anxious for me to take up did not bring me anywhere within Mrs. Carpenter's range, I felt it would satisfy me, and enable me to leave the girls in a position in which I need have no fears at all for their futures.

Of course, like every mother, I expected they would marry, but I did not want to feel they depended on this, or that, when married, they would be dependent on their husbands. The happiest marriages, from my observation, are those in

which the means are equally distributed, and there is no asking or giving on either side. It is surprising what an ugly element money can bring into marriage, when one side or the other is obliged to keep harping on it, and I had always promised myself that when Kathleen or Jo found a husband, I would be able to put down a *dot* equal to anything the husbands thought fit to settle on them. As it happens, of course, I've still got them with me; Jo seems much too taken up with her dog-breeding to have time for admirers, and Kathleen—no, I'm not so happy about her: but this is all running ahead of the story. Anyhow, as I have often told them, they won't have anything to worry about when their mother's gone, and as the duke is one of their trustees and Dr. Remington another (it was poor old George, until he died), I don't have to worry about some fortune-hunter getting hold of them for the sake of their money.

I have said enough to show that I am not a religious woman, and it may sound foolish when I admit that I—during this time when I was trying to make up my mind—I went down on my knees every night, and asked for guidance, and, above all, that no harm should ever come to Kathleen or Jo through any act of mine. And, morning, noon and night, I worried, worried, worried over it, until I could almost feel my hair turning white under the strain. There was no one to whom I could go for advice; I had to make my decision entirely by myself, and although, to be honest, I very seldom followed the advice that was given me, I often liked talking things over—with Mr. Somervell, before our trouble, sometimes with George, with Flora—if it happened to be that kind of thing—and, just lately, with the duke. They would say one thing, and I would say another: and the fact of putting it into words helped to build up my own point of view, so that I was much surer of it when I finished than when I started! That is the use of discussion, to my way of thinking; you don't "discuss" to have your opinion altered, but to settle it all steadily in your mind.

I realised, however, that I could not go on seesawing in my mind much longer, and one night I decided I would settle it all with myself before I went to bed.

▼ I always remember that night. It was a Sunday—the day Mr. Somervell used to come and see us. Sundays seemed a bit

flat at Sutton; I didn't really care for the suburban life, after Plymouth Street, and the people who used to call bored me to death, although I put up with them for the sake of Kathleen; she had made one of two friends in the neighbourhood, and I liked her to have them in and to know she was not moping over her reading, of which, by the way, she did not do so much as formerly. I was glad to see the craze for poetry was over; but I had given her a library subscription, and there were novels all over the place. I sometimes wondered if I ought to have a look at them; one heard of some funny books getting printed since the war, and I didn't want Kathleen to get old ideas before her time. However, I had enough on my hands without reading; she never said anything, and although once or twice I thought she came out with some rather cynical remarks for a child of her age, I guessed it was just this business of being "grown-up" and keeping up with her companions, several of whom were a few years older than Kay.

On this Sunday evening, Kathleen and Susan had gone to bed, and Jo was, of course, still away at school. I put out most of the lights and sat with the french windows open into the garden—the tobacco plants were lovely that summer, I remember; their scent still reminds me, whenever I meet it, of that night when, for good or evil—and mercifully it has turned out for good, so far—I settled our future for us. I wonder what they would say to-day, if they knew? Bless them, money just falls from the skies, so far as Kathleen is concerned; and if Jo, who is a little more businesslike, should ever take it into her head to ask questions—there's always the nursing home, which is now, as every one knows, the finest thing of its kind in this country; and Sir Hugh Remington—they say he is sure to end up with a peerage—with his estate down in Berkshire, the yacht on which we went for a cruise last summer and a "shoot" in Scotland, that he always wants us to visit! They both know I have shares in the home, and when I am out I'm supposed to be there, although I have given up most of that some years ago. There was an uneasy moment, at one time, when Kathleen started talking about taking up nursing, and said she meant to get into the home—which would have been awkward for all concerned!—but it passed like the rest of her crazes. Remmy sometimes shuts one eye when he visits us at Brockett and says to me on the sly, "It's a good thing

you've got Avenue House" (the name of the nursing home) "Is a cloak for all this!"—But I never worry; if anything had been going to come out, it would have come out long ago.

I sat there in the dusk, with the scent of the tobacco flowers, and I felt half stupefied with thinking. My mind seemed as if it would not concentrate any longer; I had been over all the pros and cons a thousand times, and now, just when I was on the point of decision, all sorts of other thought seemed to creep in: foolish, small things, a lot of them to do with the girls' childhood—Kathleen cutting her first tooth—and a day Harry had been very nice to me, and brought me home a bunch of daffodils (I found out afterwards they were conscience money! It was the first time he'd been out with his Mrs. Hornby—but who cares? It was kind of Harry)—and, still farther back, Laura and me grooming Snowberry for the gymkhana—our confirmation day—and suddenly, like a stone, out of nowhere—Aimée Wakeford.

I did not even know I had hit my hand on the table until I felt the pain running up my arm; I must have given it a real blow. And I sat there, looking at my hand, and saying Never, never, never—aloud: just as if there was someone there to hear me. Presently, when the pain was a little less, I opened my hand, and spread it out, as I had done for Dr. Lavigne; and, in some strange fashion, as I sat, looking at my hand, I seemed to see in it what he must have seen: all those strange potentialities for good, all the comfort in those thick fingers, all the peace they might bring. . . . It was as if I was looking at a stranger's hand, a good hand, a kind hand, that would bring harm, willingly, to nobody; that would bring good.

Then—I suppose I must have been very tired—my thoughts became all muddled again; it seemed as if I could not steady one, or single one out, for long enough to examine it. Kathleen—and Flora—and poor little Lady Perdita—and—goodness knows why—that little servant of Mother's she had to send away, because it was not proper for her to have her illegitimate baby in the house with Laura and me about. I even started to wonder what had become of the poor little thing—to whom I had certainly not given a thought for more than twenty years! Pity—pity—pity. . . . Mary pity women. I sat there in the dusk with the tears streaming down my face, thought for who or what I hadn't the least idea!

I thought of the way women get penalised, just for being women: of working girls who lose their jobs, and working class women victimised by their husbands, and poor kids going on town because there's nothing else left for them, and silly kids whose families will see they never go on town, but whose lives are ruined just the same; and things that go on in furtive little back streets, and smart West End men rooking people thousands for the same sort of thing—and the whole game of secrecy and blackmail, ending now and then in a police court case and somebody's funeral. . . . It all spun in my brain like a circular saw: until I found myself holding my head in my hands and crying out something—I don't know what—something about it's not being fair. . . .

The next thing I remember is looking at the clock; and it was after two. Keeping such early hours as a rule, I had quite a shock. I got up, and I was stiff; I went to the windows to shut them, and could not help standing there, just gazing at the out-of-doors. You never saw such a night; the moon was full, and threw the shadows of the little apple trees I had planted at the end of the garden across the grass, which, with the heavy dew, looked for all the world as if someone had sprinkled a packet of Christmas-tree frost all over it. And there were the bunches of tobacco flower, standing up like some kind of perforated border of pure silver all round the edge; the plants had collected and tidied themselves, in the coolness of the night air—I used to think they were rather straggling, clumsy things in the day time, flopping away from their stakes and looking half dead as soon as they got the sun on them; but I was fond even of their clumsiness. They reminded me a bit of Kathleen, when she was growing; in spite of what people say, there's something beautiful, in a way, about the awkward age.

What with the stars up above, and the stars of the tobacco plant round the lawn, it looked like a fairyland; and my mind went back to The Cedars, and Laura and me, on just such nights, hanging out of our bedroom windows and getting a bit sentimental in spite of ourselves; and old Snowberry, looking like a dream pony, made out of silver, moving about the paddock, cropping the grass—that is a sweet sound, of a pony cropping grass under the moon. It almost seemed as if Snowberry might be over the hedge at the end of the garden,

and that Mother might come out, in one of the light-coloured gowns she wore in the summer, and take my hand. I thought, if only Mother was here, to tell me what to do; and then I remembered what she used to say, as we got older, and were capable—she thought—of judging for ourselves. "Just you do what you know is *right*, dearie; you don't need to ask me, or anybody else, about that."

I came in and closed the window, and the moonlight lay in white patches on the staircase, as I went up to my room. I took a peep at Kathleen, and she was fast asleep, with her book fallen on the floor and the light still on—I could not break that child of her habit of reading in bed. I heard Susan snoring behind her closed door—and I wondered if I would ever get to sleep again, and wished I'd got a sleeping draught—a thing I had never taken in my life.

It was no use putting my light out, so I picked up a magazine I had brought in with me and started to look at the pictures. I was always interested in photographs of houses and rooms—especially anything of that Queen Anne or William-and-Mary period, like we had at Crowle; there was an illustrated article on somebody's place in Herefordshire, and I found myself thinking how nice it would be to possess a place like that; how beautiful I could make it, and what a good background it would make for the girls, when Jo had left school, and they were both coming out. My mind began to fill itself up with pictures I'd seen dimly, as if at a great distance, many times before; but they were no longer dim and distant, they were there, close to me, life-size, and their colours so bright they almost made me blink.

I saw the three of us—four, counting Susan—in a lovely home, the girls with their horses, a couple of cars, perhaps; their friends coming in and out—boy friends, of course, as they grew older. I saw my Katie on her wedding day—all white, like a Snow Maiden; and I tried to see Jo—although it was hard to picture that harum-scarum getting married! I saw holidays for us all—the girls with their husbands—here, there and everywhere; perhaps to America—I'd always had a hankering to see New York and Chicago. I hoped one of my sons-in-law would be a bit of a sport, and take the old girl around places—shall I make a confession? I always wanted to see a gangster's funeral!—all those flowers, and the mortuary

parlours, and the girls dressed up as angels in white satin, with real ostrich feather wings stuck on, singing the deceased's favourite hymn! That just got my sense of humour; I had a fancy Jo would appreciate it, too.

And I thought of making my will, and how I would leave something to Stan and Albert and Ozzy that would surprise them—although of course the girls would get the bulk of it; and a nice legacy for dear old George, and a remembrance for Hetty. Ever since old Mrs. Glaize died I had been cracking myself to get those two to marry, but it was plain they never would. George had a one-track mind; it was no use trying to do anything about it.

To hell with it all! I thought at last, and I got out of bed and found my purse and took out a penny. Heads I'd go to Orléans, tails I'd stay at home. Up it went, and of course it came down on the floor, and I had to go crawling all over the room on my hands and knees to find where it had rolled to.

I know now I'd have cheated. If it hadn't come down heads, I'd have gone on spinning until it did; for my mind was made up. But there was the king, showing me his profile, and I hope it wasn't *lèse majesté* when I spat on him for luck, and put the penny away, for a mascot. One gets these fits of superstition, and I never think it pays to disregard them.

The following day I wrote my letter to Dr. Lavigne, and nearly a fortnight passed before I had the answer: typed, and so formal, you would never have believed how well we had got on at St. Jean de Luz. I showed it to Remmy, and, although he kept a hold on himself, I don't think I have ever seen a man so excited. "You're made, Rose; you're made." He kept saying it over and over again. I felt as if I had had a knock on the head; now I had crossed my Rubicon, as it were, the whole thing seemed like some sort of a foolish dream, from which I would wake up at any minute.

Before I departed, I thought I would drop over to George's and try out on him the tale I had prepared for other people. He was very glad to see me, as usual, when the taxi dropped me at "Kosy Kot," just as he was finishing his supper. The window was open, and the smell of fox terrier and old Mrs. Glaize was gone; it was a great improvement.

George was in mourning—black arm-band, black tie, white shirt with a thin black stripe: but the fact of his having on one of his ordinary grey cheviot suits prevented the general effect from being too lugubrious. He had, as it were, worked through the immediate post-funerary stage, and a sober cheerfulness seemed to be in order. While he was showing me the enlargement he had had done of his mother's last photograph, and telling me he meant to have it hung in the parlour, where he could look at it while he was having his meals, he told me about the trouble he was having with his married sister, who, as we had expected, was determined George should come and live with her.

"I don't want to hurt Annie's feelings," he said, in his kind way, "but it's not as if she was by herself, and I've got into the way of living here. It's very good of her, of course——"

"Good my foot," I told him. "What that bitch wants is to see you don't get married and make sure of your money. Come on, George, pull yourself together and stand out for your independence."—I still had the habit of shocking him; nobody else ever dared, and it was good for him. I was encouraged when he gave me what almost amounted to a wink, put the photograph of Mrs. Glaize away, and we went into the garden, where we sat while I told him the version I had thought up of my next trip abroad.

"So you're off again." His little hazel eyes looked at me quite wistfully. "You'll be forgetting all about England one of these days, Rose."

"Not I," I answered, "but foreign travel broadens the mind. A bit of gay Paree would do you good, George! Why don't you slip across for a long week-end, when you get your summer holiday?"

George looked startled, then a bit doggish, and finally embarrassed.

"I guess it's not my line. Well, where are you stopping?"

"One of the hotels, I suppose. The lady I'm going to will make all the arrangements. And I'll make a nice bit for myself out of the trip."

"Money's not everything," said George.

"Of course it isn't. But we'd all look pretty poor without it!"—I tried to turn it into a joke.

"Well," said George, and he fetched up a sigh from the soles of his boots, "perhaps you'll have enough of it some day."

"If all goes well, George, that day isn't far off," I could not resist saying to him. He gave me a look like an anxious old dog that doesn't quite get its master's meaning.

"I'm very glad; so long as you're all right."

"What d'you mean?"—He had caught me on the raw.

"So long as you don't get yourself into trouble," said George stubbornly.

"Good God, what do you suppose I'm up to? Robbing the till?"

"No, Rose. I bet you'd never do anything dishonourable. I'd stake my last penny on that," he said, so solemnly that he made my flesh creep.

"Of course I wouldn't!" I spoke sharply, because he had made me cross. But I remembered what a good old pal George had always been, and I think my voice softened as I went on. "There may have been one or two moments in the past . . . it's not easy for a woman to keep dead on the line when she's fending for herself. But it'll be all plain sailing from now on; you can take my word for that."

He nodded once or twice, as if he wanted to believe me, but did not find it as easy as he would have liked. And I suddenly realised that, fond as he was of me, and believing in me up to now, he had not swallowed my story of the trip to Paris. Well, if George didn't, other people would not either; I went over it quickly in my mind, trying to find out the leak.

"I've never wanted money for myself!"

"You don't have to tell me that. And you've made a fine job of the girls, Rose; I don't know anybody but you could have done it.—I guess I'm an old fool: but, just now and again, it comes over me to worry about you, Rose."

"Whatever for?"

He rubbed his nose and gave me a silly, shy sort of smile.

"Blest if I know! I expect it's what they call an—instinct."

"Now, George, cut out instincts." In another moment I would have had the jitters. "What you want's a drink! For goodness' sake, cheer up; I'll have to be going in a minute. You don't happen to have such a thing as a bottle of Guinness

in the house, do you? I could use it—my tongue's like leather."

When he had filled the pewter mugs—which I had given him for his last Christmas—and we sat drinking in the parlour (I would sooner have had it outside, but George said it didn't do to make the neighbours talk), he said I could drop him, if I liked, at the top of Brixton Hill.

"Hetty moved out there?"—I gave him a wink. He didn't take it.

"Hetty——?"

"I thought you might be doing a bit of courting," I said demurely. "Come now, how much longer are you going to keep the poor girl hanging around——?"

"Now, Rose, you know there's nothing of that sort between Hetty and me." He sounded reproachful, as he always did when I brought the subject of Hetty on the *tapis*. "I want to go and see one of the lads" (by which I understood him to mean one of the shop assistants). "I fancy there's a bit of trouble going on, and perhaps it'll clear up if I have a talk with him. I don't like fetching in the law, until it can't be helped."

I agreed that the law generally made more trouble than it was worth.

"Mind you, I don't say, as a lot of people do, that the law's an ass," said George solemnly. "The law's there to protect people who are too silly to protect themselves; and it sometimes looks as if they're in the majority."

"But, like a good many other institutions that have been invented for the benefit of fools," I pointed out to him, "it doesn't leave room enough for folks who are capable of thinking and acting for themselves."

"Individualists, eh?"—George sounded doubtful. "They're all very well, Rose; but they're a bit of a bother in a society like ours. It's the community that matters, isn't it?—and one fellow walking out of steps spoils the look of the file."

"Pooh! What's the file matter? It might as well be a chain gang, if people like you had your way," I retorted.

"No, no," said George, and I could see I had hurt his feelings. "I'm all for the liberty of the subject, but you know liberty can be abused. The law keeps things comfortable for decent people; and that's only fair, to my way of thinking."

"It depends what you call *decent* people." As usual, George's smugness made me argumentative. "I know lots of people I call decent, that you turn up your nose at. The truth is, George, you're damned self-righteous! And do you know why? Because you've never gone outside your own little narrow circle; you've never troubled to find out how people live, or the problems they get up against. You think there's a cut-and-dried answer to everything. Well, there isn't; and perhaps one day you'll find that out. I'm afraid it will be a shock to you; but it will do you good."

George said something that I could not have believed, if I hadn't heard it from his own lips.

"Why, Rose——! We—we've got the commandments——"

"And the collects, and the Lord's Prayer, and the creed——eh? 'Lead us not into temptation'—I wonder how many times that prayer gets answered? 'I believe'—Listen, George: I believe the intelligent human being has the right to be the final judge of his own actions and so long as these bring no harm to any one else, nobody's got a right to criticise."

"Ah!" said George, as if he had caught me out. "But who's to say if they bring harm or not? Pontius Pilate said, 'What is truth?'—meaning nobody ever knows the whole truth about anything. You may *think* you're doing no harm——"

"If you start Pontius Pilate-ing, that takes me out," I said, getting up. "Thanks for the Guinness, George—and we'll be seeing each other when I get back. Kathleen would like it, if you popped over one evening; what about tea, on Sunday?"

"I dare say I'll manage that." He had got up too, and he laid his hand on my shoulder: an unusual thing for George, who generally kept his hands to himself. "Just bear one thing in mind, Rose: you've never got to worry about Katie or Jo, while I'm around."

I thanked him again, and I dropped him at Brixton Hill, and that was the end of it: except that for once I had not enjoyed my visit to George. He irritated me with his preaching, and I felt people ought not to presume like that on an old friendship. My word, wasn't it a mercy I hadn't married him?—A couple of years, and I would have been as batty as poor Lady Cynthia. I felt I would like to see Mr. Somervell, and tell him I was sorry, and make up the friendship again;

but I remembered the talk with Lady Emily, and decided it would be better to leave it alone for a while.

I spent a month at Orléans, and when I came back I was worn out. It wasn't the work, which was most interesting, and I knew from the beginning that I was up against the greatest thing I had ever met in my life: a thing that was going to benefit humanity, and bring comfort and peace of mind to many. If I had not believed in the rightness of the work, after I began studying with Dr. Lavigne, I would have turned it down; and that is God's truth. But I had not been with him more than a few days before the last of my qualms had vanished; I recognised the purity of his motives, and that he was really working for the benefit of the human race; and I was prepared to take any trouble or risk to profit by the knowledge he put—in every sense of the word—in my hands. I should add that it was he who made me serious about what I was doing; all the flippancy with which, I must admit, I had approached my work up to now faded out.

But I must also allow that, by the end of the week, I discovered that he sapped every bit of my energy. He had only one subject: the work. And he went on about that as if it was a religion. It struck me the apostles must have been pretty tiring as companions, always harp, harp, harping on the one old string. I had always been used to working like a nigger, but when I came off the job I liked to relax myself: if it was only reading the paper, or having a drink and some silly talk, joking and larking with somebody, being frivolous for an hour. But Dr. Lavigne had never heard of relaxation, and when I tried cracking a few jokes, and found they didn't register, I gave up. I regretted very much that I had accepted his invitation to stay in his own house, instead of at one of the hotels—an offer he had made because the house itself stood some little way outside the town, and he said it was inconvenient, getting in and out.

The house, which stood in its own small grounds, behind a row of lime trees, was a holy terror: all polished floors and furniture, and not a comfortable chair in the place. It was run by an old woman who was some sort of relative of the doctor's, and who never spoke a word to me all the time I was there, except "*Bon jour*" and "*Bonne nuit, madame.*" Except for

the *bonne à tout faire* there seemed to be no servants; goodness knows how the place was kept as it was. No windows, except those of the surgery were ever opened, and the whole house reeked of cooking. I used to get up an enormous appetite, to begin with, at those savoury smells, which never lined up with the food that was served on the table. The old woman did the cooking, and I don't know who started the fable that all Frenchwomen are good cooks, for we had practically the same thing every day: a *potage*, followed by some steamed or boiled fish, and a dish of radishes on the side. There was almost no conversation at meals, for Dr. Lavigne was too tired, and the old woman, who sat down with us, just got her snout in her trough and paid no attention to anything else. It was lively—I don't think.

Two days a week Dr. Lavigne went to Paris and I was left to my own devices; but there was not even a little pub or café within a mile's walk, and when you got there it was a sort of place for workmen, who did not know a word of English. It wasn't gay, either, as you expect French taverns to be; the men sat and played dominoes and the women sat—and stared at me. It was not worth the walk, and after I had been at Dr. Lavigne's a fortnight, I began to feel as if I was in a nunnery.

After dinner, he would get out X-ray photographs and diagrams, and explain them to me until my head went round in circles. I was never any use at that sort of thing; but once let me get my hands on the human body, and I promise I knew as much as most of the specialists in internal or bone diseases who had ever come my way. Not as much as Dr. Lavigne; in him I had the sense to know I had met my master. So I strangled my yawns and tried to take it all in. Sometimes, when he gave me case histories, he was very interesting.

I discovered he was working against time. Sometimes he said to me, "No one but you will know this . . ." and I felt he was referring to his own death. His right hand was almost useless (he never spoke of it, but I had a shrewd suspicion it was poisoned) and he was in constant pain; I used to see the beads of sweat breaking out on his brow when he was doing manipulations. At the end of three weeks I thought I had learned my job, but he would not hear of my leaving until the end of the month. "You will never have this opportunity

again," he kept impressing on me, and, as I realised the more experience I got the better, I did not argue. But I never had such a strenuous month in my life: not physically, but mentally. It was like being forced to live on a plane to which one did not belong. It took it out of me, but, as I have said, it sobered me up, and made me realise, once and for all, the tremendous responsibility of this work, which nobody but Dr. Lavigne, and myself, could do.

Dr. Lavigne had a great number of patients, while I was there, many of them foreigners—I mean, not even French. They came to him from all over Europe. When the patients were English, I was kept out of the way; actually, the only ones I was allowed to help him with were of the working classes, whom I believe he treated free of charge—or for so little that it did not matter, even to them. I also discovered that he refused almost as many patients as he took. "*Infame!*" I got to know as one of his favourite expressions of disgust, which he would use when he came out of the consulting room, where he had left someone with a title and a name that sounded to me like patent medicine. I got to know that his principles were as high as his interest in his work, and that money would not buy his services; that set the seal on my respect for Dr. Lavigne.

After I got back, nothing happened for a long while. I took up my work at the nursing home again, and picked up a good many, but by no means all, of my private patients. It was rather harassing, but I remembered my dividends, and decided to pin my faith to the future. And, at last, I got my opportunity.

CHAPTER FOUR

IT WAS a filthy, February night, I remember, and I had just got in and started to change my wet clothes, when the telephone rang. It was Remmy, telling me to come straight to Harley Street.

"But I've only just got in!"

"Never mind that. Come along and don't argue. And look—take a car, and tell him to wait here for you; it isn't a moment for cheeseparings!"

This sounded like business, so I rang up a local garage, told Kathleen and Susan I had to go out again, and, when we got to Harley Street, I was shown, not into the consulting room, which I knew, but into a study, very cosy with its blazing fire and shaded lights. I had just had time to reflect that Remmy did himself well, when he came in quickly, closing the door behind him. He wasted no time in preliminaries.

"What are you doing to-morrow?"

I got out my book, which I luckily had with me, and showed it to him.

"Knock 'em all out," he told me.

"Why? What is it?"

"You'll be wanted to-morrow evening, at seven."

"Well, that's all right." I was relieved, because I never liked muddling about with my appointments. "I'm finished at six."

"Look here, Timmy," he said earnestly. "Nothing has possibly to go wrong with this. I want you at the top of your form. You probably won't get another chance if you can't bring it off to-night——"

"But that's impossible to guarantee!" I interrupted him. "Even Dr. Lavigne——"

"That's your look-out," he cut in roughly. "This isn't an ordinary case, and the money's"—the sum he mentioned made me gape. "I needn't say the conditions are perfect discretion, as you won't know anything. You'll be told no names, and you won't even know where you're taken."

"Taken? Isn't it in town, then?"

"There'll be a car waiting about twenty yards above Stanley Gate at seven o'clock. You'll get in—that's all. You'll do your job, get your money, and—if you're wise—forget all about it." He surprised me by holding out his hand; it was years since Remmy and I had gone in for the formality of shaking hands. "Unless you're snob enough," he added with a smile, "to enjoy remembering that you've got a very important person out of a very tight corner. But, if all goes well, you'll get plenty of that sort of thing, before you're through."

Well, it all sounded to me a bit too much like a seven-and-sixpenny thriller, but it promised excitement, and, since Remmy was in on it, I felt sure it was "on the square." I had imbibed enough of Dr. Lavigne's principles, as well as his practice, to be determined not to get myself mixed up with anything shady, and I guessed it was one of Remmy's own patients, who trusted in him, and in whom he had confidence. So I agreed to all he said, and went home. He told me to send the bill for the car to him, and reminded me to take the day off, so that I was fresh for my job at night.

It all turned out the way he described, and as nothing quite so extraordinary has come my way since, and it really seemed more like an old-fashioned melodrama than anything I had ever come up against: moreover, as the people it concerns are no longer alive, there is no harm in my setting it down here.

I have never even tried to guess where I was taken, although I got a sort of idea we were driving round and round the Outer Circle of Regent's Park; it was a black night, and pouring with rain. The chauffeur drove so fast that one could see nothing but the lights scudding past; once we went into a skid, and he corrected it in a way that showed he was a first-class driver, and pushed back the glass partition to beg my pardon. We turned in eventually at what I took for drive gates, but it must have been a terrace; there were the steps and pillared porches of Regency houses, and the one at which we stopped had a very fine old lantern hung under the portico.

The door was opened by a man who I saw at once was not a servant; in fact, I never saw a servant while I was in the house, except the chauffeur. This person received me formally; he evidently had some authoritative position in the household, and he waited while I slipped out of my coat,

which had got a little wet between my taxi-cab and the car at Stanley Gate. When I had laid it over the arm of a settee—I noticed that everything bore a coronet—he said, "Do you mind stepping this way for a moment, Mrs. Timson?" and led the way through a door at the end of the hall, which opened into something that looked like a small anteroom, or secretary's office; there was an elaborate writing table with a marble top and curved and gilt legs, and I just had time to notice the magnificent lustres that hung from the wall lights on either side of a handsome fireplace.

The man unlocked the drawer of the desk and handed me a sealed envelope. "Perhaps you will verify the contents of that, before initialling this receipt," he said to me.

I may as well admit that my fingers shook a little as I counted the forty ten-pound notes that were in the envelope, but I managed to keep my voice casual, as I said:

"Yes, that's correct," and took the pen from his hand. This was the first and only time I signed a receipt for my fee, and he must have noticed my doubtful look, for he said:

"That has only to be shown to a certain person, Mrs. Timson, after which it will be destroyed."

So I wrote "R.T." at the foot of the sheet of paper (which bore no address), and watched while he blotted it, sealed it into another envelope, and put it back in the drawer, which was locked again. I noticed he wore the key on his watch-chain, and thought there was nothing chancy about this establishment!

I followed him up the fine staircase, and a little way round the gallery at the top of it. I imagined I looked quite cool and collected, but I have never been more nervous in my life. I felt that all I had learned in Orléans was now at stake, and the credit, not only of myself, but of Remmy and Dr. Lavigne. We stopped outside a closed door.

"When you are ready to leave, there is no need to ring for a servant; I will be waiting in the hall."

Then he knocked, and a voice said, "Come in." He opened the door for me, and I passed round a tall, painted screen, hearing the door close behind me. The room was dimly lighted, and at the far end I saw a very elaborate bed. As I approached it, I recognised a face which, from the papers and

the illustrated magazines, was nearly as familiar to me as my own.

For the first time I felt the future to be secure. Oddly enough, the removal of strain, coming so unexpectedly, knocked me right over for a while. I did not exactly have a breakdown, but I had to go very slow. I cut out nearly all my private work; I felt it would not be fair to Remmy to let him down over the nursing home, so I kept that on, two days a week, and, as I am never happy to be doing nothing, I spent a good deal of time at Avenue House, helping Alice to fit out the new annexe we had been obliged to add to the original establishment.

We were always packed out. Avenue House was the most fashionable of the West End nursing homes, and, although preference was always given to neurological cases, people fought and bribed and went on waiting lists to get in. One of the "features" was perfect sound insulation; any one who has ever been in a nursing home will realise what that means. No tapping of heels or clattering of trolleys to disturb the rest hours; one patient could have the wireless roaring full blast without a sound penetrating to the room next door, and there were telephone and wireless installations to each room. We had coiffeurs, facial experts and manicurists on the premises; pages to send shopping, and well-supplied book and flower stalls in the entrance hall. Remmy's latest idea was a solarium built out on the roof—artificial sunlight, of course, except for the third Wednesday in August, or whenever it is we get a bit of real sunlight in England.

So I had no lack of entertainment when I was not actually working. I attended the committees to make sure we were not running into bankruptcy—there seemed no prospect of that—and kept the house running quietly and simply at Sutton. Looking back, I am not sure if that was not the happiest time in my life. I had not, for once, got more than I could carry; I was getting out of debt; Kathleen's physique seemed to be building up—I had got her a Ma'mselle, and the pair of them jabbering French used to set my teeth on edge, but I managed to curb my feelings; and Jo, of course, was still as jolly as a sandboy at The Towers.

Remmy had kept his word about finding me a financial adviser, and every now and then I popped a bit of money into some safe investment, or even took a flutter on 'Change; but it was years before I started to play the market, which was eventually to become as much of a hobby with me as gambling on horses is to other people. I began to feel a solid woman; I indulged myself in a little Hillman car, and we went picnics in it at the week-ends. I really was within modest distance of the fortune I had boasted about to George, ten years ago; and sometimes it felt as if it was not ten years, but only a few months, since I was sitting in The Copper Kettle off the Strand, talking big to give myself courage.

That first strange commission, of course, had been followed by others. I took only the cases which came to me through Dr. Remington, as I felt these were accredited ones, and I was still nervous of trusting to my own judgment. Remmy was very decent, too, about his rake-off; I had paid him back the money I borrowed to go to Orléans, and he only took a small percentage of the fees he put in my way.

That summer I booked a Mediterranean cruise for me and the girls; we had never had a holiday like that before, and I thought it would be a thorough rest and change for all of us. The girls had a grand time, and I didn't do badly myself. There were plenty of young people, and deck tennis, shuffle-board and skittles never let up from morning to night, when it was *petits chevaux* and dancing, with lots of flirting on the boat deck thrown in. I dare say a lot of people thought I was sticky, because I had Kathleen and Jo in their cabin on the stroke of ten, but I may say that by the time we got to Corinth, my two were the only ones that did not look the worse for wear. Kathleen had a couple of elderly *beaux*—it rather worried me that she always seemed to attract the middle-aged men, instead of boys of her own age—but I kept her under my eye when we went ashore to see the sights, and I always had a pretty good idea of what she was up to, while we were aboard.

After they had gone to bed, I used to go into the bar, where I had picked up a lively crowd who taught me to play poker. I managed to steer clear of them during the day, because I didn't want the girls to get in with that set and learn thing unsuitable for their age.

The trip ended, as such trips usually do, with a fancy dress ball, at which Jo carried off the first prize as a Scotsman with a red beard (she would), and we were waiting for the train to start out of Southampton; and I was just saying how lucky we were, getting a compartment to ourselves, so we could strew our bags and all the junk the girls had brought back all over the seats; and the guard's whistle had just gone, when the door was dragged open by a porter, a man's pigskin case was thrown in, its owner clambered after it, and, of all people on earth, it was Mr. Somervell!

His jaw fairly dropped when he saw us, and I was annoyed to see Kathleen turn purple; it was more than time she had laid that bogey. Jo, as you can imagine, saved the situation; she flung herself on Mr. Somervell as if she was a baby, instead of a great girl getting on for seventeen, and kissed him as if—well, he might have been George. Even I was quite embarrassed. Jo, of course, had never understood why we stopped seeing Mr. Somervell, and she took her revenge, the little devil, for all the times I had fobbed her off with this and that, by way of an explanation: for she wanted to know at once why he never came to see us now, and I was quite sorry for Mr. Somervell, trying to do the polite thing by everybody, and nearly swamped by that great, galumphing Jo.

"How are you, Rose?—How are you, Kay, my dear?"—He shook hands with both of us as well as he could round Jo, who was the size of a house that summer, what with overeating and a bit of gland trouble I meant to have corrected. I made her sit down and behave herself, but it would have taken a gag to make her stop talking.

"Where've you been?" What have you been doing? Don't you know our new address?"

I must say Mr. Somervell was remarkably patient.

"Where've I been?—Germany, Russia, America," he told her. "Mainly America. It's a fact! I've hardly been in England for the last two years."

"Well, now you're back, you'll come and see us at Sutton," said the pert madam, lolling against him as if he belonged to her. "We've got a garden, and some cats, and my spaniel Beech—and we've just come back from the Mediterranean, and we went to France last year. So you aren't the only person who's been travelling!"

"And how did you like France, Kay?"—He obviously said it to draw her into the conversation, for she had not spoken a word since he came into the compartment. I felt vexed with her for giving herself away like that, and a bit ashamed of myself, and of the letter I had written to Mr. Somervell; for now he was with us again, I realised how incapable he was of the behaviour I had attributed to him. As Kathleen did not answer immediately, I spoke to her rather sharply.

"Don't you hear, Kathleen? Mr. Somervell's speaking to you."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, in a silly, mincing sort of way—not a bit like her usual voice." "I wasn't listening."

"Did France come up to your expectations?" he repeated kindly.

"No—I don't think it really did. I wasn't so frightfully thrilled with it," drawled Kathleen, in such a voice that I could have smacked her.

"I never heard such nonsense! You should have seen the pair of them, Mr. Somervell! Kathleen was as brown as coffee all over, and ran up and down the sands shrieking like a hooligan!"—at which, if you please, she twitched her shoulder round, and pretended to be staring out of the window.

"If Kay was like coffee—*café au lait*, I suppose—I bet this specimen was like cocoa; good, dark cocoa, without any milk in it at all,"—he took no notice of Kay's rudeness, but gave Jo a pinch which, of course, started a tussle; fortunately she caught my eye, and it quietened her down. "Well, Rose, you're looking very well."

"I'm feeling very well," I told him.

"Not killing yourself with work, as usual?"

"No, that's over. I'll tell you all about it, some time"—about the nursing home, I meant. I gave him a look, and he nodded, and, it may sound foolish, but I found I was very glad at the prospect of picking up our friendship and our long talks again. If Kathleen can't behave herself, I thought, she will just have to keep out of the way. It was just like her, to take a thing against him, after being crazy about him for so long. Of course, she might have been feeling awkward, but she had been told over and over again that we realised it was only part of her illness, and there was no need for her to behave in such a silly, conspicuous fashion.

At Victoria, Mr. Somervell and I strolled off towards the customs benches, while the girls went to look for the car, which I had had brought up by a man from the garage. Our baggage—being "S" and "T"—had been placed side by side, and while we were waiting for the inspector to come along, I looked straight up at him.

"I'm *very* glad to see you again." It was meant to be my apology for the way I had misjudged him, and I saw he had taken it in, for he gave me a very nice smile as he replied.

"Thank you, Rose.—Kay all right?" he asked presently.

"You wouldn't ask, if you'd seen her on the trip!—She's better than she ever was in her life," I was glad to reassure him. "That silly breakdown!—it was all my fault, for letting her overwork herself."

"You needn't blame yourself for *that*, Rose." He was looking away, and perhaps I imagined the emphasis on *that*, which seemed to suggest I might blame myself for other things; I imagined he was referring to the letter, and felt I deserved it. "Well, I'm terribly glad about Kay; it must be a weight off your mind."

"She was a bit silly in the railway carriage—but you know how she is: all up or down. I expect the excitement of coming home has got hold of her."

The inspector had reached Mr. Somervell's bag, and he turned to attend to it. I occupied myself with opening ours, and trying to hide a filthy pair of Jo's socks, which, of course, she had put right on the top.

"Have you anything to declare?" asked the inspector.

"No," I answered absently, for Mr. Somervell had got his case closed again, and was holding out his hand to me.

"Well, good-bye, Rose."

"Not for so long, I hope, this time," I said, as I took it. "We're in the book, and I'm not so full up these days as I used to be."

"That's very kind of you," he answered. "I'll give you a ring, if I may—one of these days.—By the way: I ought to tell you—or perhaps you know already? I am going to marry my cousin Emily Hope."

I may as well admit, it was a knock-out—for a moment. I soon pulled myself together, and said something about hoping he would be very happy, and Lady Emily as well. I knew, of

course, that she had been a widow for years, but I had never thought of her as the re-marrying kind, or imagined she was the sort of woman to attract a man of Mr. Somervell's type. It only goes to show you can never tell.

"Emily and I will be delighted to see you——" I took that as it was meant; for, although Lady Emily had always been very nice to me, and wonderful over Kathleen, I always had a feeling I was not exactly a favourite of hers, and that we had very little in common; and I could not help knowing that Mr. Somervell, married, would be very different from the person who had so often sat cosily chatting over a cup of tea, in the little parlour at Plymouth Street.

So I thanked him, and he gave my hand a grip, and looked for a moment as if he had something more to say; but he evidently thought better of it, and I stood for a minute, watching his tall figure walk away among the crowd.

"What about this?" the inspector was saying.

Well, "this," of course, was the four boxes of cigars I had brought for George, and the bottle of brandy, and a lot of hand-embroidered silk underwear I had bought on board—all of which I had forgotten in the excitement of meeting Mr. Somervell again. It took a bit of clearing up, but at last we were in the car, Jo beside the man, and Kathleen and I in the back; I thought she was rather silent. But not Jo, of course; she kept bouncing round, asking questions like, "Do you think Beech will remember me?" and "Was it *last* Monday on *next* Monday for the kittens to be born, Mummy?" and, at last:

"Wasn't it *lovely* to see Mr. Somervell again?—Mummy, do ask him to come to lunch on Sunday! I'm sure he would love to."

Kathleen's answer quite startled me; I had never heard her speak to Jo in such a way before.

"Oh, don't be such a silly ass! You don't suppose he wants to waste his time with people like us, do you?"

Pique, I thought, because he paid more attention to Jo than to her, in the train. And whose fault was that? Poor Jo looked quite crushed, for once.

"There's no need to be so nasty to your sister, Kathleen. If Mr. Somervell hasn't got as much time to spend with us as he used to have, it's because he's going to be married."

"Married? Did you say married? Who to?" squealed JOE. Oh, Mummy, I've never been a bridesmaid! Do you think he'll let us be bridesmaids? Wouldn't it be fun?"

"He's marrying Lady Emily Hope," I told her, "and it's the bride's business, not the 'groom's, to choose the bridesmaids. Besides, as Lady Emily has been married before, I don't suppose she'll have bridesmaids."

"How funny," said Kathleen. "How funny." And she started to laugh. I don't know why her laughter made me feel creepy. I stood it as long as I could, then I said:

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Kathleen, be quiet; you're giving me a headache."

But when we got back to Sutton, she was still pushing herself back in the corner of the car, smothering her laughter in her hands.

Yet, what with one thing and another, that was a pleasant year. At Christmas we went down, all three of us, to Cissie May's. Of course, I have forgotten all about telling how I came to know Cissie.

It was the year George took us to the Derby; he had always threatened to, and we did it in style; a hired Daimler, luncheon basket from Fortnum's, and dear old George in a white topper and sponge-bag pants! I decided to go gay too, and had my first dress from Handley Seymour's—who have dressed me ever since, except for my tailor-mades, that I get at Flora's place, in Savile Row. It was a very pretty turn-out of pale violetty grey and I had a hat made to match, by Madame Germaine, of Worth's. The girls had light biscuit-coloured coats over pink summer frocks. George and I cut quite a dash in the paddock; I never realised how distinguished he could look, when he got into the right clothes—for which, I may say, I was responsible: as I was for taking the couple of pansies out of his buttonhole and making him stop and buy a gardenia.

About the first person I saw was the duke, with a big party of people, and, of course, he saw me, and I think George had the shock of his life when he found me on chaffing terms with a duke. I introduced them, and they got on like wildfire, over gardening; I heard George inviting the duke to come and see his lobelias, and I nearly choked myself with trying not to laugh at what the duke would think when he set eyes on

"Kosy Kot." Then suddenly I heard the duke say, "Hallo, Cissie!" and there she was.

She looked so much bigger on the stage that at first I could not believe it was she; then I saw the big mouth and the bright eyes, screwing themselves up in the sunlight, the bright blue eye-shadow and the long lashes blobbed with mascara, so that they stood out like black-headed pins, and I knew it could be nobody else. I remembered the first night I had heard her sing *I don't mean what you mean*, and the way she had put heart into me—and I suppose something of what I was thinking got into my smile, for when the duke said:

"Cissie, this is Rose Timsoh; you two ought to know each other——"

—Her hand came into mine as if we were friends of a lifetime, and the thought flashed into my mind, This is a woman I can love. It was sheer prevision, for Cissie and I have loved each other ever since, and I often thought of the way her little hand came into mine, that day in the paddock at Epsom. Cissie had the smallest hand and the biggest heart in the world. We followed the duke and George across the grass, Cissie eyeing George, to my amusement—it didn't take much to see that she had an eye for a man.

"A little something of yours, dear?"—She jerked her hat with the little curled blue ostrich feather in it towards George. I laughed at the idea.

"No fear. I've given up that form of sport, at my age," I told her.

"Get along with you," said Cissie. The two men went strolling ahead. "What I call a fine figure of a man. That one ought to be the Dook." And, as a matter of fact, I agreed with her; for the duke looked a regular little cock-sparrow, trotting along beside George, whose shoulder came about level with the top of the duke's head. She turned her wise little face towards mine—in spite of the heavy make-up, she was beginning to show her age, and she was much thinner than she had been ten or twelve years ago, though there was still plenty of bosom, and she carried herself like a little empress. "I know what you mean, dear; men are nice creatures, but they're tirin'. A woman likes to have a bit of a rest, now and again."

In spite of which. I noticed she didn't take much of a rest

while the men were about. She and the duke were evidently old friends—I heard later on that they had been something more—and the pair of them kept us in a roar the whole time between the races. If it had been any one but Cissie, I believe I should have been jealous; for, after all, the duke was supposed to be my boy friend! But you could not be jealous of Cissie. She had none of the tricks of playing another woman off the field that so many have who have always commanded masculine admiration, and while she was cracking her jokes with the men (I could see George was fairly bowled over) she kept catching my eye and giving me a look, as if we had got a secret between us. Trust Cissie for not letting any one feel out of it. The girls were enchanted with her, of course—they were of an age to feel a big thrill in being seen about with any one as famous as Cissie May; and she was as sweet to them as she was to me.

Flora was there; she had driven down in Beetle Curzon's four-in-hand, with a party of young bloods from the Debrett, and the whole lot of them were as blind as owls. Flora insisted on wavering up to our party, on kissing me and the duke (George's face was a picture) and on informing everybody that she had "fixed things up" between the duke and me and she thought it was high time we stood her a bottle of fizz. Of course, they all—except George and the children—knew Flora, and there were some ironic cheers and ha-has, and I knew this would take a bit of straightening out with George—but I was starting to get worried about Kathleen (who could be fairly well trusted to understand anything she was better without), when I saw Cissie, with her arm through Kathleen's, strolling off to get some money on the race. Bless her heart! You might not think that Cissie, with her broad songs, and her innuendoes on the stage, would have much regard for the innocence of a girl like Kathleen; but that's where you would be wrong. All the years they were young, Cissie—who could use language like a bargee when she felt that way, and tell a story so hot it was a wonder it did not blister her tongue—never said a word in front of those girls that I would not have used in talking to Mother. Later on, when I knew Cissie's friends, I found music hall people in general like that; they would be foul-mouthed enough among themselves, in their easy fashion, but put a child or an ignorant young person

among them, and their delicacy was touching. And that is more than can be said of the Society people I knew.

Somebody towed Flora away, and I found an opportunity of slipping my hand through George's arm and telling him no one took any notice of Flora; and anyway, she was as drunk as a coot. At which George, who was looking thoroughly wretched, cheered up a bit and began to enjoy his Derby Day once more. But I could see that, what with the duke and Flora, he thought I had a pretty queer set of friends. He was getting an eye-opener, but I did not mind. I felt it was good for him.

As a matter of fact, I was surprised, on that day at Epsom, to find out how many people I knew. Yes, I had learned a lot about Society in the last few years; I bowed to some, and others I looked through, to save their doing the same by me. I knew a lot of secrets, and I was quite aware of some uneasy looks out of the corners of eyes which, if I happened to glance in their direction, hastily looked away; but they need not have worried. If those years had taught me anything, it was to keep my mouth shut.

"Bring the kids down to Sunningdale one Sunday," Cissie told me, when we said good-by. "I've always got the place full over the week-end, but there's nothing there that will do them any harm."

"You don't need to tell me that," I accepted gratefully.

"Oh, I saw you, when that old kite started off about you and the dook." She gave my arm a squeeze. "I hate folks that don't care about kids, don't you?"

In the car, going home, Kathleen said:

"Mummy, who was that old woman?"

"Do you mean Cissie?"—I felt quite indignant, although I realised that to any one of Kathleen's age, Cissie probably appeared as old as the hills. But she soon put me right.

"Oh, *she's* an *angel*.—No, I mean the frightful old woman with yellow hair."

"She's nobody special—poor old thing, she's a bit cracked, you know," I told Kathleen. I felt George looking at me.

"But she *kissed* you, Mummy!—Ugh; it gave me the creeps."

"Well, it needn't. She kisses anybody," I said—a bit too carelessly, for Kathleen sounded quite shocked.

"Do you *know* her?"—I felt her actually disapproving.

"One gets to know all sorts, if one's earning one's living." And then, of course, Jo had to pipe up.

"What did she mean about 'fixing things' between you and the duke? What things?"

I haven't often felt as if I would like to do my children an injury, but I could cheerfully have thrown Jo out of the car. To my horror, I felt my face getting red—and there was George, the great fool, sitting like a graven image, or the day of judgment, or something—I could have smacked the pair of them.

"If you paid as much attention to the things you should as the ones you shouldn't hear," I was beginning. Then I caught George's eye, and to my astonishment, for he so seldom butted in between me and the girls, he said:

"That will do, Jo." And she was so much taken by surprise that she was silent.

I knew it could not be left at that; so when the Daimler stopped at our door, I chased the girls off and turned to George.

"So you're still chewing that over."

"Chewing what over?" he was deceitful enough to reply.

"About me and the duke."

"No, I'm not," he said gloomily.

"Then, George Glaize, what on earth's the matter with you?"

He got it out, after a while.

"These folks you know in the West End, Rose—they're not the sort for you."

"Don't talk such arrant rubbish!" I fairly lost my temper; I had so enjoyed the day, and here was George spoiling it all.

"They're not," he persisted. "Katie's right; that old woman with the yellow hair—there's something wrong there, Rose. I don't like to see you and her together."

I was touched in spite of myself; there was something really pathetic about old George, with his goodness and his ignorance.

"I know all there is to know about old Flora, George; you're right, she's a bad hat; but she once did me a good turn. Poor old cow—she won't be here much longer, at her

rate of a couple of bottles a day! And you wouldn't expect me to turn people down, when they've been kind to me?"

"You look out for their kindness," croaked George.

"Oh, bless me, do you think I can't look after myself?"

The gardenia was dead in his buttonhole, and his hair had got untidy under the white topper. Poor old George; his grandeur had somehow departed from him, and, in spite of his swell new outfit, he looked a bit like a broken-down music hall turn. It's very hard on a man, when he is feeling tragic, only to look foolish. And he had given me such a lovely outing!

"You won't let any of them get you into trouble, Rose?"

I leaned forward and put my hand on his.

"Never, George; I can promise you that. For the sake of the girls, nobody'll ever be allowed to get me into trouble."

He looked a bit happier after that, but all the evening I felt the cloud of his anxiety hanging over me, and wondered what on earth he could have in his bonnet, when everything was going so well for us all.

CHAPTER FIVE

IT'S JUST occurred to me, in talking about the children, how little I've said about Jo. And that's all the thanks you get, I can fancy her saying, for not making a nuisance of yourself! She would be the first to make a joke of it—bless her!

It isn't as if there was little to say, either. Right from her babyhood, Jo was a real character—full of fun and affection, and on real good terms with herself and the world; I've never met a child more popular, or less spoiled by the fuss people made of her. Jo never had a thought of self; and this, in a way, was her downfall, for it made us all take her for granted. With Jo one never had to steer clear of moods, or pick and choose one's language; she had a laugh for everything, and, best of all, for herself. The contrast between her and poor Kay, eaten up with self-consciousness, was almost painful; or it would have been, if Jo had not, from the very beginning, taken it on herself quite naturally to cover up all Kay's moments of awkwardness. Jo loved us all, but she fairly wor-

shipped Kay; and it often puzzled Susan and me, when we could not make head or tail of Kay, in one of her moods, to see the matter-of-fact way in which Jo tackled her, and the mildness with which, sooner or later, Kay would give in to her younger sister's handling.

For, there's no blinking the truth: Kathleen led us a nice dance for the next few years after she left The Towers.

"Oh, for the love of God, Rose," Cissie used to say, "let the girl alone; it's only temp'rament." Cissie would have it Kathleen was an artist. "It isn't the things that come out of people that make them artists." I remember her being quite grave about it. "It's the make-up inside: the way they look at things and people—the sort of vision they've got on life in gen'ral. Sometimes they can express it and sometimes they can't; but being dumb doesn't make you any less of an artist, if you've got the goods!"

I thought it sounded a bit cockeyed, but I knew Cissie was wise, besides being sweet and brilliant; so I tried to possess my soul in patience, and see what comfort I could get out of an "artistic" daughter. It wasn't much. Frankly, Kay didn't, me, show the smallest aptitude for art, though I'd persuaded her to go to the local art school, as we had planned all along, and did all I could to encourage her at home. Commercial art, she informed me, was "just cheap stuff—to catch the eye." Well, if a picture doesn't catch the eye, what's the good of it? All she did was to putter about with bits of clay and paper, producing things she called "abstracts," which I thought looked very much like the sort of stuff they taught her in the Kindergarten. So I felt there was no point in her going on with it; it was a sheer waste of money.

Then there was the French craze, and Mademoiselle, whom I have mentioned. That was even shorter. I quite thought her trips abroad would have made her keener than ever on it, because they seem to speak French everywhere on the Continent, and I was quite proud, she spoke it so prettily on our shopping expeditions in the ports and in the restaurants we visited here and there. But no; that was another flash in the pan. When we came home she would not be bothered with her French lessons, and Mademoiselle, after a lot of that irritating French shoulder-shrugging, said that, as Kathleen would not work, she might as well give in her notice and find a more

appreciative pupil. One person was glad to get rid of her, and that was Susan; Mademoiselle was always criticising what she called *la cuisine*, wanting to poke her nose in the kitchen and exclaiming over the "extravagance": until I forgot my manners one day and said that though the French were very economical, it was what their circumstances had obliged them to be, and there was no virtue in living on offal. I still hadn't got over the meals at Dr. Lavigne's!

I suppose the next move was natural. Seeing so much of Cissie and her friends, Kathleen got it into her head she wanted to go on the stage. Although I did not care for the idea, I felt, for once, there might be something in it. I told Cissie all about that performance of *Prunella*, and she did not seem particularly impressed; I expect she thought it was just the old story of the fond mother, thinking her duckling's a swan. "I can't help her," said Cissie flatly. "I don't know anybody in the legit., and of course Kay's no good for the halls. Get her behind the band and the floats, and nobody'd see or hear her." However, I thought the duke might help, because he had a lot of friends in the profession, so I had a word with him: and he said he had a bit of money in a show that was on in the West End, called *Early to Bed*, and he thought he could get her something in that.

But that did not suit my lady at all. She wanted to be in Ibsen or Shakespeare. All right, said Cissie; send her to the Academy. If she passes her entrance, she'll learn something about acting and have a chance of catching somebody's eye.

But after a term of Gower Street—would you believe it?—it was the same old story. Whatever she took up, her enthusiasm seemed like the flame of a candle; the first puff of wind would blow it out. She "never had the parts she wanted"; it was "such a fog going up to town every day"—all the signs, as I knew, that the work wasn't going the way it should. I got so worried about the child that I took her to Remmy, and he diagnosed anæmia, and said she had better stop at home for a while. I did not expect she would mind, as she was always grumbling, but there were tears, and a scene, and she "was never allowed to do what she wanted"—and then the giving in—as if it was all hopeless, we were all against her and she had no heart to struggle any longer.

I actually spoke to Jo about it, when she came home for her holidays.

"I don't know what to do with Katie, Jo; she hasn't got a notion of settling to anything."

Jo looked quite solemn, for once.

"I think she's only stretching herself, Mummy."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, I think school's rather a tight fit for anybody like Kay. I wouldn't worry, if I were you; I'd just pretend to take no notice, and—let her alone." She threw an arm like the branch of a young tree round my neck; Jo's embraces were always a test of one's staying power. "You know I'm leaving at the end of next term, Mummy!"

"My God, and then I'll have two of you to drive me crazy." But I was glad to think of having the child at home. She was a real little champion, and I never met any one more contented, or determined to get all the good she could out of life. I unhooked her arm, and gave her a kiss and a slap.

"Mum, I want you to buy me a wife for Beech."

"Thinking of breeding?"—The idea was not a bad one. Beech had furnished into a beautiful dog, and had taken a second at Cruft's, much to Jo's triumph and delight. She nodded eagerly.

"I bet I'd make a success of it. You always say I'm like grandfather, and I'm fonder of dogs than anything. I've got to have something to do when I come home, and there's quite an income to be made out of breeding, if one goes in for it properly."

I remembered some kennels the duke had recommended, and a very pretty little spaniel bitch he had shown me, which would certainly make a good mate for Beech. To tell you the truth, I was nearly as much attracted by the prospect as Jo, for the love and care of animals were bred in me, and I was pleased to see it coming out in her.

"It's a full-time job, if you mean to make money out of it," I warned her.

"I know that," Jo answered cheerfully. "I don't care. When I come home, Mum, I want to settle down; I shan't mind about holidays when I've got the pups to look after. I haven't got any brains, so I haven't got to bother about a career!"

I felt like saying Thank God to that! I knew my Jo, and her solid, reliable character that underlay all the harum-scarum foolishness of her school days, and I felt warm and comforted at the thought of having one of my girls by me, to share her interests with me and come to me for the advice which, fortunately, I was able to give.

I loved Kay dearly, but there is no denying she often hurt me, and it seemed sometimes that the harder I tried, the farther I got from understanding her, and the more bitterly we quarrelled—usually over trifles which, when one looked back afterwards, seemed of unbelievably little importance, really to have given rise to the violent tempers and unkind words we both gave way to. And yet—she was often so sweet and affectionate that she made one feel one would do anything for her. She had made friends with a family of young people, and especially of one of the girls, Mary, who was up at Oxford, studying for her degree. In the vacations she was always at Mary's, meeting Mary's friends from college, and what we had to swallow about life in the University was nobody's business. She was always moaning about not having been allowed to take her Matric, and how the only thing she had ever wanted to do was to go to college, and how lucky Mary was—until she made Susan and me quite miserable.

I almost felt like an old woman, by the time Kathleen had her twenty-first birthday. It happened to coincide with a first night of Cissie's—who had been persuaded to play the lead in a musical someone had written specially for her—and I gave a supper party at the Savoy, to which she came on afterwards, bringing most of the principals. George was there, and some of Kathleen's and Jo's friends, and Pixie Carpenter, and we had the Pinafore room and made it a regular "do." Kay looked sweet, in an ice-blue chiffon I had chosen for her; the silly child had actually wanted to wear *black*! I lost my temper with Jo, that time, for backing her up. "It's Kay's twenty-first, and if she wants to be sophisticated, I do think you might let her, Mummy!" As if anybody was ever heard of wearing black at a twenty-first party! I went off and ordered the ice-blue from Handley Seymour's, and she really looked lovely—although, of course, she elected to have one of her moods, and one would have thought the party had nothing to do with her. However, that was Kathleen's way; she wasn't a

mixer, like Jo and me. And, in spite of acting like a little ghost, I'm sure she enjoyed it. It was the first big party we had ever given.

She now had her own allowance, and I had given her a hundred pounds extra, to spend as she liked. I had done **very** well that year, and I was delighted, for the moment one wants to give a good present is usually the moment one is short. Kay went off to stay with a school friend in Berkshire, and when she came back she was all over herself with excitement.

"Mummy, I've bought a cottage!"

"Whatever for?"

"I just wanted it. It's a heavenly little place—not much bigger than a doll's house—but it's early Tudor, and it's got those enormous beams that curve round a bit because they came out of the old fighting ships. I adore it!"

I had not seen her so happy for years. The idea that she wanted to get away from us all and be by herself hurt a little, but I resolved to wait and see how things turned out. I felt fairly sure this was only another craze, and that a short, sharp dose of early Tudor would send Miss Kathleen gratefully back to the comforts of her home.

It wanted "a few things doing to it," she said, and Jo and I were not to come down until it was ready; it was to be a "surprise." So the place was littered up with patterns of curtain material, colour cards and bits of carpet; and boxes of china and glass started arriving and had to be stored in all sorts of places where Susan kept falling over them and stubbing her poor shins in the dark. Then she got an invitation to join a party of young people who were going on a trip to the Dolomites, and she said she would really get down to it when she got back.

One evening I said to Jo:

"I wonder what sort of a place this is they've wished off on Katie?"

To my surprise, Jo didn't seem very interested, but as I guessed Kathleen would have told her more than she had told me, I thought I might as well get some information.

"What did she pay for it?" I persisted.

"I don't know."—But the tone made me give her a sharp look; her face was red, and she looked uncomfortable—as well she might.

"Jo, that's a fib!"

"Well, Mummy, why don't you ask Kay?—It's her cottage."

"As Kay doesn't happen to be here, I can't ask her, can I? There's no harm in a simple question, is there?"—I spoke rather sharply, feeling sore with Jo for siding against me with Kay.

"No, there isn't; but as it's Kay's business, I expect she'd rather tell you all about it herself," mumbled Jo.

"Don't be so ridiculous!—I suppose they've pushed off some tumbledown hovel on her, because it's 'picturesque.'"

"Oh, she'll be getting it all put right before she moves in," said Jo, so hurriedly that I knew I had hit the mark.

"M'm. I'd like to see Katie's notion of 'putting right'—I'll tell you what, Jo; we'll take a run down in the car and have a look at this early Tudor discovery."

"Why, Mummy, it's sure to be all right! Kay knows the sort of thing she likes, and she's so looking forward to showing it to us herself when it's ready."

But the very reluctance Jo showed to the idea of our going down to Berkshire had decided me; I knew something about Early Tudor drains, and quite enough about Kathleen's delicate throat and chest not to trust the combination of the three. In spite of Jo's bringing up every reason she could think of why I should not go down, and flatly refusing to accompany me, I was having no arguments; I ordered Judd, and down I went to the country.

It was ye olde olde, all right—but, I was relieved to see, genuine. Not a drain or a sign of sanitation, of course. I found out where the local surveyor's office was, and asked for an immediate report.

"As a matter of fact," the young man I interviewed told me, "I can give you one right away. We had to get one out for a prospective tenant in the spring. Frankly, he decided not to buy as the necessary alterations were going to come to a good deal more than the place is worth. It's the same with most of the labourers' cottages in this part of the country; the people round here have a very primitive standard of living—I suppose the centuries have hardened them to it."

"What about drainage?" I asked.

"Oh, the usual," he said airily. "There's a cesspit that has to be emptied every few weeks——"

"But there must be a drain somewhere? There's quite a few good class houses round here; they can't all run on the cesspit system."

"Oh no. But to run the drain from the cottage into the main and do away with the pit would cost quite a lot; it's the best part of half a mile—that's why Miss Timson got the place for sixty pounds." He seemed amused.

"What about a water closet?"

He shook his head.

"Not enough pressure. Most of them use the old-fashioned earth privy. Of course, you could have an El-san," he said hopefully. "The water situation is really rather difficult," he confided. "Baths, for instance; you have to pump the water, and in summer the wells are usually dry. Drinking water? No, I wouldn't recommend it—not without boiling, that is."

I could see Kathleen boiling water.

I was really at my wits' end. I didn't want the child to think I was always spoiling her pleasure, and, of course, the cottage was very pretty, with its thatched roof and a few orchard trees in front; I could quite see how it had taken her fancy. But I could smell mice, and I knew those old fireplaces; they fill the place with smoke and give out no heat unless the wind happens to be in the right direction. There was a lot of damp too. I asked the surveyor if he could recommend me to any local workmen.

It ended in my giving them *carte blanche*. By the time the drainage was put right, a bathroom and lavatory put in, the damp got rid of, fireplaces bricked up and small modern grates put in and all the old windows and door re-puttied, that cottage was going to cost about four times what Kathleen paid for it, but it would be fit for a human being to live in.

I told Jo about it when I got back, but she only looked uneasy and muttered something about Amber's puppies having started to arrive; so, although I could have done with a little praise and appreciation, I had to be satisfied. After all, there was no getting sense out of Father when a mare was foaling.

I knew the cottage would not be quite ready when Kathleen got back, but I thought I would say nothing, and leave her to make the discoveries for herself. She looked very well after her holiday, seemed pleased to be home, and asked if she might

borrow the car to take down a lot of the things she had been buying for the cottage.

Jo and I were having dinner when she came back. I heard her go up to wash her hands, and presently she came down and took her place quietly at the table. She was quite pleasant, said the drive had been lovely, the country looked beautiful, and it was so mild after the Dolomites. I couldn't put up with this for long—I really did want to know what she thought of all the things I had done for her cottage—or with the extraordinary way Jo was behaving: looking at Kathleen out of the corners of her eyes and mumbling into her plate. So at last I said: "And what about the cottage?"

She took her cigarette case out of her pocket. I was sorry she had taken to smoking, but I couldn't say anything; they were all doing it, and I smoked like a chimney myself. Kay lit a cigarette and blew out the match before replying.

"Very nice. I've made three-forty on it."

"What did you say?"—I did not understand her.

"I've sold it to some people for four hundred pounds."

"Well, Kathleen," I said, when I had taken this in, "I don't suppose I'll ever know what you take it into your head to do next."

She gave me a smile I shall never forget.

"I don't suppose you ever will, Mummy."

And that was all she ever said.

It was Cissie who rang me up at two o'clock in the morning (any hour after midnight was the same to Cissie) to tell me Brockett Chase was empty. "And there are about fifty people after it with their tongues hanging out. If you don't have it I'll buy it myself; I bet I can make a good turn-over."

I had been thinking for some time about moving from Silverdale. It was a nice little house, and we had been happy there; but, speaking candidly, I knew I could afford better, and it seemed fair to the girls, now they were growing up, to provide them with a better background than a little semi-detached villa in the suburbs. I was in an awkward position, for it is one thing to have people know you are what they call "warm," and another to stab it in their eye. I happened to know there had been quite a bit of winking and nudging over Judd and the Bentley: people living in houses like

Silverdale don't usually run a big saloon car and a man in uniform. My connection with Avenue House was, of course, a matter of common knowledge, and I made no secret of the fact that I was going in in a small way for house property, and, tipped off by Lady Solness, had picked up some quite valuable little Thames Valley places that brought me in big summer rents and let well enough in the winter to pay our very moderate expenses at Sutton.

But I had to be careful, because of the Inland Revenue. They did not know about my flutters in the stock market, or the sums which, acting upon the duke's advice, I was salting away here and there—a good deal of it out of the country; and I was careful about what I paid into the bank, even going so far, now and again, as to run a little overdraft, just, as the duke said, for the hell of it! I gave myself a careful margin, and for the most part kept well inside it; because it was most important that there should be no record of my earnings—an easy matter to arrange, since, for my private work, I always insisted upon being paid in notes not exceeding ten pounds in value. I knew that my only crime would lie in being caught, and of this I never had a moment's apprehension; but for the girls, I would never have given it a thought. Meanwhile, the less curiosity my conduct and way of living roused, the farther the danger receded.

No, I had no sort of shame about what I was doing, and I have none to-day. If any one likes to be cynical, and say I could afford, on the money I was making, to be shameless, I would just like to tell them that for every pound I made I gave away thousands in value, for which I never made a penny. I remembered Doctor Lavigne, and the people he saved and comforted, and I am grateful to-day for the blessings of humble people to whom what I have done for them means more than it ever meant to the wealthy ones whom—I don't mind admitting it—I plundered. Human need goes beyond moral values, in my opinion; and if I have ever wanted any reward for the risks I have taken, I get it in seeing the people I have helped walking about with their heads up and looking their neighbours straight in the eye, when they might be crawling round corners, or even worse than that.

Still, Brockett was a bit of a plunge, and I hesitated, until I went over and had a look at the place for myself. I knew the

house vaguely, as it was near Cissie's, and I had always rather admired the bit of it you can see from the gates, and across the palings that cut it off from the main road.

But when we went over it, I knew I had come to the end of my journey. It was a small, Regency villa, of a type of which you find plenty of examples along the Thames; almost perfect of its kind, and neither too large nor too small for a family like ours. The rooms were large and well-proportioned—especially on the ground floor, and the last tenants had left it in beautiful condition; there was no need to spend a penny, except on the domestic quarters, which were well modernised. There was a little lodge, the garage, some stabling at the back (which Jo claimed at once for her kennels) and room enough for two tennis courts without cutting the garden up like a public recreation ground. It reminded me—except that it was much prettier—of The Cedars; it had that comfortable, old-fashioned solidity, and the lofty rooms which I have always preferred to the modern taste for low ceilings.

Well, I arranged for a mortgage, and took the place over as it stood, lock, stock and barrel. I asked Susan if she would be willing to stay on with us as housekeeper, and left it to her to engage a small staff. We moved in there in September, 1928, and I felt like saying, "Home at last!" I wished Mother had been alive that day.

Kathleen always says, "It's easy to see why Mother bought Brockett!"—She means the drawing-room, which is certainly my favourite room. Each of the four corners is built into a little alcove, with shelves and concealed lighting: the perfect arrangement for showing off china or *objets d'art*. Years ago I found a little painted snuff-box that started me off, and ever since I have been picking up bits here and there—some of which are really valuable, though I think the dealers saw me coming once or twice. But I had quite a collection of pretty and unusual things by the time we went to Brockett, and I got any amount of pleasure out of arranging them where people could look at and admire them. I still had Mr. Somervell's little soapstone lady, by the way; she had certainly fulfilled her promise of keeping poverty away from the house. I offered her to Kathleen for her sitting-room, but as she did not seem to care about her, I gave her a little bracket to herself

in a corner. I've got a streak of superstition about me somewhere, and it comes out now and again in things like that.

The house was always full of company—the girls' or mine—and people told me I should soon be getting ready to welcome a son-in-law. But Jo was too wrapt up in her kennels to have time for boys, and Kathleen kept me worrying about her because she never seemed to look at a man unless he was elderly or married or tied up in some way that put marriage out of the question. One time it looked as if there was going to be trouble about a man in the neighbourhood who started neglecting his wife and running after Katie; I soon put a stop to that. Of course, the child was not to blame; she was really very attractive, although perhaps I should not say it—some people even called her distinguished, which is a word I like the sound of, and it seemed to suit my Kathleen. Her hair had darkened as she grew older, but it was a good, bronzy shade, and, need I say, always cut in the newest style; she had a beautiful figure and, like all the girls, she used far too much lipstick—especially as her mouth was on the big side, and the rest of her features (excepting her eyes) inclined to be small. Whatever were the latest fashion, in hats, or furs or jewellery, Katie had to have then; and she never seemed to wear the same thing twice running; she was a great spender, was my Kathleen!

Still, why not? You are only young once, and the money you spend on yourself as you get older does not make up for having to go short when you are young and gay. She rode and played golf and tennis and never seemed to have a moment to spare; dashed off to the Continent now and again, dashed back and was tearing up to town before her things were unpacked. But I knew she loved her home, and we used to have great confabulations now and again, about the house and garden, and, all of a sudden, she would throw up all her social engagements and settle down to planning a new rock garden or redecorating a room, as if there was not another thought in her mind. She would generally fly off in the middle, leaving us to tidy up her loose ends, but she never did it without making an apology and promising, "if we would only leave it alone," she would finish the whole thing. Bless her. The world was "so full of a number of things," for Kathleen; I did not blame her for not wanting to miss any of them.

Jo, of course, was just the opposite. Steady as a rock, she was actually turning her dog-breeding into a money-making concern. It was the death of Jo each time she had to part with a puppy, but she stuck to it, and Brockett spaniels began to have quite a name in the kennel world. No young man had a chance with Jo, unless he was prepared to take her and her dogs together, and Kathleen once told me that Jo interrupted a proposal by looking at her watch and saying, "Look, I've got to walk these puppies; I've just been worming them." I didn't worry about Jo, but I often felt I would like to see Kathleen settled in a home of her own.

Still, there was plenty of time. In these days, women are still girls at thirty; and it was better she should take her time than rush into something she would regret later on.

Mr. Somervell and Lady Emily came down to see us once. Kathleen could not have been more natural; if anybody was a little constrained, it was Mr. Somervell; I caught him once or twice looking at Katie as if she puzzled him. Men never realise how a girl alters as she grows up and forgets about her schoolgirl nonsense. She made no comment after they had gone, except to say—which was true—that Lady Emily looked a lot older. It struck me that Mr. Somervell had aged as well, and that he had something of that resigned look that a man gets who has married with his head and not with his heart. All the same, I am sure Lady Emily made him a very good wife, and that she had balanced him in a way he probably had not realised he needed. I got a sort of feeling that there were no more wild parties for Mr. Somervell, and picking up unsuitable females like myself! And, rather surprisingly, I realised that, although I had respected her very much, I had never really liked Lady Emily, and I was a bit sorry for Mr. Somervell. . . .

I don't know what came over her, but that night, for the first time, Kathleen told me what had actually happened that day in her childhood on Tooting Common. She told it rather crudely, I thought, with a touch of bravado, as if she was seeing if I would be shocked: although there was nothing in particular to be shocked at, and I only wish I had known it at the time. Yes, my Kathleen was altering; she had lost the shy, fanciful, shrinking side, and was down to hard earth at last. But they have to grow up some time. . . .

It was Jo who elected to drop the next bombshell.

"Mummy; do you ever wonder what's happened to Pop?"

I had never known her to speak of Harry since the pair of them were little, and I hardly knew what to say. I did happen to know where Harry was, and I said I expected he was all right. I knew my solicitors had seen to that.

"I think I'd like to look him up; would you mind?" asked the unaccountable Jo.

Well, I could hardly say I did; after all, he was her father, and the girls, both of them, were old enough by now to draw their own conclusions. I told Jo she must do as she liked. She was going up to town the following day, about some business for the kennels, so I gave her Harry's address, not very willingly, and I wondered what he would say when she turned up. I thought it might be a shock for both of them, but I knew Jo could take it, and I was not sorry, in a way, to think that my conduct of the last sixteen or seventeen years would be justified. Jo had quite enough common sense to see through Harry, and it was better she should work her curiosity out of her system, instead of feeling that I was keeping her and her father apart.

When she came back, she came straight to me in the greenhouse, where I was potting some seedlings.

"I say, Mummy, do you know Pop's married again?"

I didn't, but I realised I had no reason to be surprised.

"And they've got two kids!" burst out Jo. "Our sister and brother! I must say they're rather sweet."

That was Jo, all over. She did not say much about Harry, except he seemed "a bit rocky," whether financially or in health I did not gather; the new wife was "quite nice," and it sounded as if she—Jo—had been made quite welcome. Not *too* welcome, I hoped; I did not fancy a tie-up between us and Harry's new family. It is my private belief that Jo used to send her father money after that; I once found her cheque-book, with all the counterfoils filled in, but, every now and again, instead of a name, a cross. I could not grudge it; Harry would always be hard up, and perhaps he found it easier to accept money from Jo than from me. The calls on my solicitors ended, and, if Jo was making up the deficit, she could afford it. She never spent a penny on herself, apart

from the kennels, and she was making quite a profit, now the expenses had been worked off.

I liked Brockett; I liked the life we led there, and the sort of simple dignity of our surroundings. I liked coming back there, after my work, and having Cissie as my neighbour, and I liked the way Susan had settled into her position as housekeeper and the sensible way in which she ran the three servants. There was another thing too—perhaps it seems silly to mention it; but it meant a lot to me, because I realised what it stood for. Susan had given up calling me Mrs. Timson and always said Madam. It's generally the other way round; people are inclined to grow more familiar when they have been with one a long time. But I knew this was Susan's way of showing me that she respected what I had done, and that she accepted me, not only as her employer, but as her mistress.

In 1938 George died, and left everything but a small annuity he had settled on Hetty to Kathleen and Jo. And I began to think it was getting time for me to retire. It was hard to believe it, but I had been working twenty-six years, and I had just had my sixtieth birthday.

End of Rose Timson's narrative

Part Four

KATHLEEN AND JO

CHAPTER ONE

"HALLO," said Jo, looking up from her occupation of grooming the spaniel puppy who, flat—or as flat as rotundity permitted—on its back, made lolling attempts to greet the new-comer. "Woo-hoo!" observed Jo. "You've had your hair done. A bit noisy—what?"

Kay combed back a vivid crest with violet-coloured fingernails.

"I was sick of the old way; I thought I'd have a change." Her thin, fine skin showed under the strong light of the window a hair-like tracery of lines about the eyes and the corners of the mouth; otherwise she might still have passed for a girl in her twenties. It was Jo who looked the elder now, with her ruddy, battered complexion, her cheerful neglect of personal grooming, and the rough fuzz of dark hair on which, she declared, she could not be bothered to bestow either time or trouble. Jo's hairdressing consisted of a weekly shampoo with dog-soap and chopping off the longer ends with a pair of manicure scissors; after which she usually got Kay to shave the back of her neck for her. But, in spite of her indifference to her own appearance, she took the deepest possible interest in Kay's, and the grave attention she fixed on her sister's head caused the latter to frown a little.

"Don't you like it?"

"It's very swell; but I was wondering if the colour was a bit hard, for you."

"Oh, my God!"—Kay laughed shortly. "Don't *you* start telling me I'm beginning to look my age!"

"Who says that?"—Jo returned placidly to the combing of her spaniel.

"Oh—Mother: more or less indirectly. 'I like you best in hats with a bit of brim.' 'I don't care for this halo style—it only suits girls in their 'teens.' Wait till she sees me in a *képi*!" She snapped her cigarette case and spun the wheel of her lighter viciously with her thumb—Rose's trick. "It was a dogfight at Antoine's to-day; half the girls gone and everybody scrapping for appointments for 'perms.' There's a war on!—and how." She flung herself wearily into a deep chair.

"Seen anybody you know?"

"I met Cyril, and he took me to Lois's. Drawing-room packed with elderly young men clinging together like wilting daffodils and whispering about 'assignments' in Cairo, and Cape Town, and—Timbuctoo!"

"Lady Solness in form?"

"She's organising an ambulance group—Solness is getting posted to the Middle East or something; they're expecting to have trouble there. Lois means to go out too—she asked me if I'd like to join the party!"

"What did you say?"

"That I'd heard the B.B.C. and the M. of I. were the fashionable funk-holes, and I'd probably get a job in one of them." Jo chuckled.

"You certainly go round making yourself popular. Oh well—look at young Tommy Beecham! Best of the litter—he's a pippin, isn't he?"—Jo set the spaniel—great-grandson of Beech and Amber—on his feet, where he made a great business of shaking himself and flirting out his flounces.

"Jo"—Kay paid no attention to the puppy; turned sideways in the chair, her thin hands locked on the arm, her darkened eyes looked intently at her sister—"what are you going to do?"

"Me? What do you mean?"

"You'll have to join something."

"How can I?—I've got my hands full with this chap and his sisters, haven't I?—Especially as Markham's joining the Wrens. I can't think what she wants to be in such a hurry for," complained Jo. "She's twenty-seven; they won't be calling the twenty-sevens up yet a while——"

"I expect she wants to make sure she gets into the Wrens;

it's far the most popular service. Dog-breeding isn't a reserved occupation, and—Jo: you're only thirty-three. I should be looking around, if I were you."

A look of stupefaction blotted out the customary cheerfulness of Jo's face.

"But—the war'll be over before they get to people of our age!"

"Don't you kid yourself." But there was compassion in Kay's voice. "They were saying at Lois's that this war's going on for five—six—perhaps seven years."

"But it *can't*!" whispered Jo.

"That's what they said about the last war; we were going to mop up Germany in twelve months. This war isn't going to stop at Germany; the whole Continent will be in before it's over, and India, and America too, perhaps. It's—it's going to be a sort of Armageddon." She dropped her head back against the cushion of the chair and closed her eyes. "Our good times are over; it's the end of Europe. It may be the end of—civilisation."

"I can't think it's as bad as that." Jo had recovered. "There's always a lot of pessimists, when we start a war. I'll have to make some plans, of course——"

"For God's sake, don't stick at making plans! Get yourself somewhere while you've got the chance. By the time the call-up reaches us, the services will probably be full, and they'll draft us into factories or canteen work," said Kay drearily.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jo, after a pause.

"God knows. I'm no good for anything."

"Rot."

"It's not rot. I'm telling you: I'm *no good*." A bitter little laugh jerked itself out of Kay's twisted lips. "Mother's seen to that."

Jo sat back on her heels, her face shocked and red.

"You know you don't mean that."

"Don't I?—Like hell I mean it!" She laughed again as she lit another cigarette.

"Well, I think it's a pretty rotten thing to say, considering all you've had done for you. Why, you were always the favourite."

"Yeah," said Kay, with irony.

"Anyhow, I don't suppose she'll hear of your going into the services. She'll say you're not strong enough."

Kay projected a smoke ring towards the ceiling:

"It will be a medical board, not Mother, that will make up its mind about me. What a joke! For the first time in her life, Mother's going to find herself up against something she can't do anything about! That will be a surprise for her.—And the very devil for me," ended Kay, on a whisper.

"Kay. What makes you so beastly about Mummy?"—Jo spoke uncomfortably, plucking hair out of the spaniel's comb. Kay's heavy eyes, half-closed, came to rest on her sister, with a curious expression, half scorn and half pity, under their lids.

"Never mind. . . . You wouldn't understand."

"I dare say I wouldn't; but I'd like to know what you're getting at. You're always going on as if something's biting you—as if you've been—well, *wronged* in some way. . . ." Jo's brow wrinkled with the unaccustomed effort of analysis. The other sat up quickly.

"For once, you've found the very word. Wronged! Of of course I've been wronged. What is it but wronging to take away a person's powers of will and decision?—To shut her away from every form of reality?—The real world's here now: coming at me like an express train—and I've got nothing to meet it with." Her hands were clenched, and under the thin suit Jo could see the tautness of her body. "I'm thirty-five!—and I've had none of the experiences girls ten years younger than I are supposed to take for granted. If ever I've started anything, I've been stopped——"

"Oh, for crying out loud! Be fair. You've done exactly what you liked, ever since you left school!" indignantly said Jo.

"Have I?"—Kay leaned back in her chair, with an air of abandoning the argument.

"Well, since you were grown-up, anyhow."

"By the time I was grown up I was tired of liking things. I was scared of liking them—for fear they were taken and twisted and made different from the way I meant them to be. If I got an idea, it was snatched, and pushed, and poked about, until I ceased to recognise it as mine. It had to follow Mother's

pattern—not grow by itself. Oh, what's the good of talking? Where is Mother, by the way?"

"At the clinic," muttered Jo. Kay got up and went to the window; she stood there, looking out in silence for so long that Jo became uneasy. "She'll be back in time for tea."

"I wondered if it's occurred to her yet that we may have to give up Brockett?"

"Give up Brockett?"

"How can we stop here if there aren't any servants?—Susan can't start working again, the way she did at Sutton. And if we aren't at home, Mother certainly can't keep the place running by herself. Besides, what about her work?—How's she going to get up and down from town?"

"Well, I suppose if they call up Judd, I can fix things somehow, so as to run her up in the morning——"

"Run her up—in what? They're talking of commandeering cars; petrol's to be cut, in any case—and you know the Rolls eats petrol."

". . . Oh Kay. Even now—I can't believe it. . . ."

Kay turned; the bitterness had faded from her small face. which, as she smiled at her sister, was luminous with compassion.

"That's just it. You and I—we can't believe it: because nothing has ever happened to interrupt our lives before. We've known nothing but comfort, and ease, and convenience, all our lives. Yet scores of people have had to give up their homes already; hundreds are doing jobs they never dreamed of; thousands have seen their families broken up, are having to close down their businesses and break off their careers—while you and I have spent nearly six months in behaving as if the war's got nothing to do with us. Can't you see it's fantastic? It's simply not—human! Even Mother goes on as if the whole of the war consisted in moving Avenue House down to the country, in case they start bombing London: and turning the Regent's Park place into a casualty hospital for civilians! She even talks about running it herself.—How does she think she's going to do that from Brockett, when transport gets as bad as they say it's going to be?"

"Well, she'll have to keep on with her Birth Control clinic down here," pointed out Jo.

"I wonder? She's had half a dozen blazing rows with the

council already, and Birth Control isn't going to be popular in war-time; we've got to keep up the population—for the sake of providing cannon fodder for the next war!" Kay grinned cynically. "Incidentally, they're supposed to be going to take contraceptives off the market. There's no more quinine, anyhow, unless you happen to be lucky——"

"Oh? Well, that doesn't worry me."

"Or me, as it happens.—I wonder what Mother would say if we asked her for some tips on Birth Control?—For our own use, I mean."

"Throw a fit, I should think." Jo smiled rather stiffly. "Do you remember her lecture on 'the facts of life,' before we went to The Tower? In spite of it, I don't believe she ever thinks we've got any ideas of our own on that sort of thing."

"That's what she *likes* to think," corrected Kay. "She knows perfectly well we know all about it; but she would go tearing mad if we ever took it into our heads to put our ideas into practice."

"I never have; have you?"

"No. . . . Not exactly."

"I often wondered if you were a virgin," said Jo simply.

"What made you wonder?"

"Oh . . . most people of our ages don't seem to be, and I thought, perhaps, with all your chaps——"

"*All* my chaps!" scoffed Kay.

Jo grinned.

"Your old men, as Mummy calls them!—What makes you so keen on men older than yourself? I must say I think boys are more fun."

"Oh—they're such a bore." Kay moved restlessly. "Honestly, if you went about as much as I do, you'd think the men of our generation are a pretty worthless lot. The children of the last war: half of them are homos, and those who aren't pretend they are, to be in the fashion. I'd sooner have the men who fought between 1914 and 1918; they mayn't be so brainy, but at least they proved they were worth something, and they aren't so utterly taken up with their own and each other's brilliance as—for instance, the lot at Lois's to-day."

"Well, what about the younger set?"

"You don't expect me to go cradle-snatching, do you?" She laughed a little. "Poor little devils; they're bold and they're beautiful, and they give you a pain with their idiotic courage—my God, I wouldn't be in love with one of them for anything in the world, in times like these."

"M'm. I guess we'll both do better, for a bit, to lay off the men," said Jo, with a naïve solemnity which, at moments, transformed her back to a schoolgirl. Kay stifled a smile. "Anyhow, you're a bit off them yourself lately, aren't you?"

"I don't know what you mean." A cold, cautionary note had crept into Kay's voice.

"Well, you seem to have done most of your gadding lately with Lydia Roden."

A pocket of silence had fallen into the room. Kay, about to move, stood arrested, in a strange, sculpted attitude, her hand outstretched towards some object she had forgotten. It was a mere flash of time, yet, to Jo, filled suddenly with fear of she knew not what, it seemed like eternity: eternity broken by the tinkle of china, and the parlourmaid's entrance with the tray.

"Oh . . . is Mother in?"

"The car's just gone round to the garage, miss."

Kay was at the door.

"Tell her I'll be down in a minute. I must wash my hands."

When Rose came into the room she found her daughter Jo kneeling in front of the fire. She stood for a moment, looking at the broad, white-coated back, the knitted stockings and, regrettably, the hob-nailed soles of the shoes Jo could never remember to change when she came into the house. It was less like a woman than like a thickset youth kneeling there, unconscious of inspection. Funny little lout!—and yet, for all her lack of grace, so much more feminine, in many ways, than her sister. Yes, indeed, it was Jo who was all woman; while Kay . . . that cool, baffling quality in her elder daughter was something which Rose had long given up efforts to define.

Upright as ever, Rose's once plump body had lost much of its thickness; she had begun to complain that her dresses were dropping in front, now that the proud bosom was no longer there to lift them. She wore glasses permanently, not

only for reading, and still grumbled of the way her lashes pushed them down the bridge of her short, fine nose. The strong, columnar throat had kept its noble form, but the cheeks were thinner, and their lively colour faded to an ashen rose. For all that, it was a still comely woman who advanced with the sure tread of authority towards the hearthrug, from which the spaniel Beecham rushed barking to defend his owner's privacy.

"Down, you little beggar!—Well, dearie; what's all the moping in the dark about?" With a capable hand Rose switched on a lamp standard, while Jo jumped clumsily to her feet. "That's a nice, gloomy welcome." A quick look at Jo's face checked her. "Anything the matter?" asked Rose crisply; at any rate Jo, thank goodness, was as transparent as the day.

"Pooh, no—rather not!" Jo recovered herself to bestow the usual smacking embrace on her mother. "At least"—she laughed, a little shamefacedly—"Kay's been putting the wind up me about the war—that's all."

"Oh, has she? What about it?" Rose demanded, on the slightly aggressive note with which she was in the habit of receiving any references to national events.

"She says I ought to be looking out for a job in one of the services."

Rose settled herself before the tea-tray before she replied.

"Well; so you ought," was her unexpected response. "I've been meaning for the last few days to say something to you about it."

Jo's jaw fell; it was the last reaction she had expected from her mother; it was the removal of the foundations which Kay had already disturbed.

"But, Mummy—the dogs!"

"Where's Kay?"—Rose sugared her own cup and Jo's.

"Upstairs, washing her hands. But, Mummy; is it true—that we may have to give up Brockett?"

Rose's lips tightened; she altered the position of several cups and plates before replying.

"I've been waiting to tell you. I've taken a flat in Pont Street, and I'm letting Brockett furnished from the 1st of April."

". . . It's not an April fool, is it?" breathed Jo, when she could speak. Rose laughed shortly.

Forty pounds a week isn't an April fool, my girl!"

Jo let out an involuntary whistle.

"Who on earth's the sucker, Mummy?"

"Jews, of course. They're pouring out of town already—the phoney alert last September did that for us! The whole of Jewry's convinced London's going to be bombed to blue blazes."

"What rot!"

"May be so, may be not. I expect they'll go for the docks; but nobody seems to think they'll do much on the West End. Well, now you see what you've got ahead of you. I'm sorry about the kennels, Jo." She laid her firm hand over Jo's brown fist, resting on the arm of the chair. "I believe I'm just as upset about it as you. However—that's war."

"Damn the Germans." Tears glistened in Jo's eyes; she jerked her head away.

"Yes; damn them to hell," echoed Rose softly. "Let 'em call themselves Nazis—they're plain *Germans*, the lot of them. Well, what do you want to do, Jo?"

"I don't know—I haven't begun to think. I suppose I could be a rider of some sort—they'll want motor-bikes, won't they, for despatch riding?"

"Of course, you would go in for something you can break your neck at," said Rose resignedly; but the protest was more mechanical than sincere. Bless her heart, Jo could look after herself.

"What about Kay?"

"Oh, I've got her fixed up," Rose was saying, as Kay came into the room. Kay came smiling towards the table, and held out her hand for her cup.

"Who've you been fixing up now, Mummy?"

"You."

Their eyes met. There was a short silence.

"Oh?" said Kay.

"I've just been telling Jo; like other people, we've got to make changes. I'm moving up to town, and, from the things one hears, I think you two had better not wait for conscription."

"Just what you were saying, Kay," put in Jo. "But, Mummy, what about your clinic?"

"Oh, that'll run itself now." She spoke with the superb

confidence of the born organiser. "I bet they'll have all they can handle, with pre-natal work; there's nothing like a war for making people breed. That'll suit old Mother Hamerton!"—Rose snorted. "Silly old cow! If that woman had had to bear twelve children against her will in eight years, instead of being the Countess of Hammerton——"

"Do you mind telling me what you've been settling on my account, Mother?" came in icy tones from Kay. Rose turned.

"Yes, I will. We've got Avenue House moved down to Buckinghamshire now, and the War Office is taking over our building as a military hospital——"

"Then you can't run it for your civvy casualties!—Mummy, you'll be out of a job!"

"I won't be looking for jobs in war-time," said Rose proudly. "They'll be looking for me."

"I suppose Alice is going down to Buckingham?"

"She'll carry on as well as she can, but there's going to be awful staff shortage. Remmy will have to be in town most of the time—he's on an advisory panel, or something—and I expect we'll all be at sixes or sevens for a while, until we get things straightened out." To Rose's daughters, it was amply evident that she was looking forward to the straightening process. Jo lowered an eyelid at Kay, which the latter ignored.

"Well, Mother?"

"Oh well—I've spoken to Alice, and she says she'll be very glad to have you."

"To *have* me?"

"In Buckingham, of course." Rose spoke sharply, alert to that note in Kay's voice. "Now, Katie, don't start arguing; there was a time when you never let me alone about taking up nursing."

"But it's ludicrous!" Kay's thin cheeks were stained with a resentful red. "I've never had anything to do with a sick person in my life!"

"That's what hundreds of women said at the beginning of the last war. They didn't make a bad job of it, all the same!" retorted Rose, and bit her lip: remembering that she, a trained nurse, had not taken her share in the last war. It was this deviation of her thoughts that accounted for the mistake she made in her next sentence. "You'll soon get in the way of it,

dearie; and I shall be glad to think of you, in a nice, safe place, well out of the way——"

"But I don't want to be in a nice, safe place, Mother!"

Rose sat very still.

"For God's sake!" cried Kay. "If I've got to take part in this bloody war, let me be *in* it and *of* it—not some sort of pampered looker-on: the sort of thing I've been all my life!"

Rose moistened her lips before saying, very quietly:

"What do you want to do?"

"Anything—anything *real*! Drive an ambulance, or something——"

"I suppose you got that notion from your friend Lydia Roden?"

"Why should you suppose anything of the sort?"

"Oh, I happened to meet her father in town, and he said Lydia had joined the Ambulance. So, considering that you two have been going about for the last six months like a pair of Siamese twins, I guessed what it would be. Don't be a fool, Katie. They'd never accept you. A delicate girl like you!"

"Mother, how can I be delicate, when you think of the things I've done in the last ten years? The hours I've gone riding, the golf I've played: Wimbledon the last three summers, and then the winter sports?—Oh, Mummy darling, there can't be one standard of health for peace and another for war!"

Rose sat petrified, her heart, which had lately been making her a little uneasy, pounding against her breastbone. She knew it was true; she knew she had no reasonable or honourable factor to dispose against the forces which were claiming her beloved Kay. The colour drained itself from her lips and she felt very faint.

This time—she knew it—there was no argument. At the bidding of a maniac in Berlin, all the warmth, security, material safety and comfort she had, over tortuous years, built up for her girls—especially for Kay—were blasted into a pinch of dust. There was nowhere—no one to whom she could turn for support; no conceivable trickery by which she could cheat her children into safety; no machinery she could set in action to procure for them privileges denied to the rest of the nation's women. Accustomed as she had grown to

commanding favours, her brain refused, for a while, to take in the fact of her helplessness. Among all the influential people she knew, people indebted to her in ways no money could settle, people who had told her she had only to go to them if she were ever in trouble—there must be someone, someone, who would find a way of sparing her this agony!

And Kay—Kay herself: was there no way of making her understand?—of making her accept what, after all, was a perfectly decent and honest solution of her mother's problem? There must be lack of adventure, but there was no shame in the work offered to her; and surely, at thirty-five, a girl—a woman—might be expected to look at it in a level-headed fashion—not in the romantic, excitable way of one in her twenties, athirst for drama!

"Katie . . ."

Kay stood before her, looking down on her mother with a curious calm tenderness, as though knowledge of her own power had drained all bitterness from her heart.

CHAPTER TWO

DURING the autumn of 1940, Rose Timson went through her Gethsemane. Beneath every bomb that descended, through the crash of every falling block of masonry, she saw and heard Kay; visualised the frail body buried under piles of rubble, or consuming in one of the pyres that smouldered in the West End. Characteristically, she confided in no one, going through her daily and nightly torture in a kind of magnificence of loneliness: her back straighter than ever, the ribald quip as quick as ever to her tongue. But, to the few who knew her well, her looks betrayed her—terribly. Rose was now sixty-four, and her face had become a mask; above the flash of her smile, that pushed the fine skin into wrinkles on either side of her mouth, her eyes were those of one who burns in hell. During the raids she was not known to bat an eyelash; her hand was as steady as a rock, she willed courage into whatever company she was in. But between the Alert and the All Clear she would consume, with a petrifying steadiness, the greater part of a bottle of whisky. It had not the least

effect on her, mentally or physically; she drank it mechanically unconscious of the times she filled her glass, her palate registering nothing but the sensation of a liquid.

She seldom went down to the air-raid shelter beneath the block of flats; apart from the slight feeling of claustrophobia it gave her, she felt that she lost touch with Kay immediately she passed underground. Up on her third floor, with the throb of enemy planes, the rattle of anti-aircraft guns, the scream and thud of bombs and sharp crack of incendiaries, she was, in some sense, with Kay, sharing her experiences. She had at least one consolation: Kay, when not on duty, lived and slept at home. She had the satisfaction, sometimes, of seeing Kay off to her post, slight and straight in her dark uniform; they would exchange a laconic kiss on the threshold—neither of them making reference to that which had been, or was to come.

On those nights off duty, Kay's face was strange, to her mother; it wore a white look, a look almost, Rose thought, puzzled by it, of rapture: a dedicated look. Was Kay afraid? Rose never knew. Honour kept her from inquiring, and honour kept Kay silent—the honour of the initiate, guarding the sacred mysteries of her cult. To Rose's credit, from the moment when she accepted the inevitability of Kay's task—how she had prayed that Kay might fail to pass her medical, might fail in her tests!—no word of protest or personal anxiety had crossed her lips. She allowed no comment to pass her lips, when a weary figure dragged itself in from duty, face blackened with smoke and coat soaked from a fireman's hose: once, even, with a bloody bandage round its head.

"Caught something, dearie?"

"Only a chip of ack-ack, Mummy."

No one knew what her self-denial cost Rose: how she fought the temptation to "fuss," to ask questions, to demonstrate her relief when another period of mental torment was over. Instinct told her that coolness was the best contribution she could make to the girl's courage, the surest way of expelling recent horror from her mind. To come home, and find everything "just ordinary"; this was the antidote to the hysteria which, once or twice, Rose suspected, lurking in the background. And never, never had she felt so close to Kay, so much part of her inner self, as she did, through her very

silence. Where words had often failed, silence, she discovered, was really the key to that mysterious, hidden Kay, who had evaded her for so long. A look, a smile, a careless gesture, some jesting folly thrown casually across the table—and a unison, at which Rose humbly marvelled, seemed to be established. She was too scared, too wary of the fragile thing, to threaten it with familiarities; but she felt sometimes that her anguish of relief and anguish of anxiety, one following on the other, would be too much for her, that she could not last long against the double strain.

One morning Kay brought Lydia Roden home with her. It had been what they both described as an "easy" night; only two calls on their post, and neither of them serious. Rose, in and out of the room—she could never, on these mornings when Kay came off duty, depute the service to Susan—watched the pair of them, as they sat hunched in their chairs, the marks of the night still on them, exchanging brevities in an intimacy from which she knew herself excluded. She had never liked Lydia, never approved Kay's friendship with her. Some ten years older than Kay, Lydia had, Rose knew, gained the influence over her which is easily established by a certain type on a younger, more yielding nature: Lydia, who prided herself on being taken, on occasion, for a man, who aped masculine tricks, such as striking her matches with her thumbnail, who affected a man's haircut and whose sallow, hard-bitten face was that of a vicious youth. Rose had done all she could, by ridicule, to kill this friendship, and, for a time, believed she had succeeded, for Lydia came no more to the house, well aware of the antagonism with which she was received.

But the time for such antagonisms was gone. Rose accepted it, as she had learned to accept many things. If she wondered still, what so feminine a creature as Kay could have in common with her companion, she set the thought aside. What good could come of wandering down those dark side-tracks of conjecture towards which, inevitably, the mind was bound to turn? It was Katie's life; and she—Rose, must be content with her place on the periphery.

Often she had to crush back the unworthy impulse to question them about their experiences. Like many other people

who have followed the nursing profession, she had, if not precisely a taste for horrors, a lively interest in them. "My word, Tim, your girl must have had some tales to tell you, after last night!" She became used to that approach, and found, in time, a strange, unexpected dignity in parrying it. "Oh, Kathleen doesn't talk about it. When she comes home, she wants to get away from the horrors." But she sometimes wondered whether the things Kay went through were as bad as those with which her (Rose's) imagination, aided by the sights which had become a commonplace in the streets of the West End, provided her. She wondered if the time would come when Kay would have to talk, to void herself of those scenes of nightmare which must surely be piling up behind that quiet, white brow.

Jo came on leave, immense in her A.T.S. uniform; to her deep chagrin, she had failed to qualify as a despatch rider, and had flopped into the A.T.S. as casually as she went into anything which happened to engage her attention. She brought with her a young, pale, scared-looking soldier, to explain whom she drew her mother aside.

"You didn't mind my bringing him, Mummy?—His name's in Coventry—was; and he hasn't got anywhere to go."

Jo's verbosity more than made up for the other's silence; unintimidated by the presence of a fellow serviceman, she poured out her delight in her Army career; the other girls were "sports," the officers "a very decent lot," drill and duties of secondary importance to "ragging"—in short, Jo managed to convey the impression that her camp was an improved version of The Towers, with superior liberties, and Jo herself, if she kept reasonably on the right side of authority, had every prospect of getting into the Sixth and becoming a prefect. The young soldier, whose name turned out to be Bob—it did not transpire until the following morning that Jo had not troubled to acquaint herself with his patronymic—seemed timidly amused. Rose, sharp at placing people, decided that he came of a humble background, which afflicted him with an inferiority complex that a good standard education had failed to cure. He had rather fine hands, which he used nervously, a nondescript physique, and a head and face of that mediocre pleasantness which the British as a race pro-

duce in quantity, and which almost invariably fails to impress itself on the memory. Rose felt sure that if she met him in the street she would not know him again.

Gradually thawing under the glow of Jo's kindness, he became a little more communicative, but his fatigue was so marked that Rose pitied him, although it was difficult to see what, apart from her incurable benevolence, accounted for Jo's bringing him home.

"He can have my bed, Mummy; I'll sleep like a top on the sofa."

"No fear——" began her visitor.

"Shut up," said Jo. "You've done Dunkirk—he has, Mummy; and he's only been out of hospital a fortnight. So he's got to have a bed, wherever the rest of us turn in."

"Look here." Bob made an effort to assert himself; his brows knitted with mingled annoyance and embarrassment at Jo. "Nobody's going to give up their bed for me. I told you I could get in at the Red Cross."

"We'll see about that to-morrow," put in Rose sharply. "I don't suppose any of us will see our beds to-night; it's nearly time for the raid to start, and you'll all go down to the shelter."

"Blow the shelter. I haven't seen a raid yet," said Jo. "I vote we stop up here—don't you, Bob?"

The spasm that twisted the youth's face, leaving it blank, did not escape Rose's quick attention.

"As you like." His mouth was stiff.

"There's no 'as you like' here. I'm not having either of you make more work for the wardens." Rose picked up a rug, as the silence of the black-out was ripped by the wail of the sirens. "There you are—and fetch your overcoats; it's none too cosy down there." To refuse to go herself would, she knew, call forth a torrent of argument from Jo; she resigned herself reluctantly to spending a night downstairs, and looked for the attaché-case which, like all raid-hardened Londoners, she kept packed in readiness for such occasions. Susan appeared, and they trooped out—since the lift, as usual during air raids, was not working—to the stairs.

"I say, they don't lose any time, do they?" Already the hum of planes mingled with the dying moan of the sirens. Jo, her teeth flashing in the twilight of the stairs, was

obviously set on enjoying a new experience. No one answered her. After a pause, more timidly, her hand on Rose's shoulder, she lowered her voice to ask, "Is Kay out in this, Mummy?"

"I expect so." Her ordeal had begun.

Other people were descending the stairs. No one mentioned the bombers. Getting her first lesson in air raid etiquette, Jo lapsed into silence until they reached the shelter. In passing through the door, Rose's arm brushed against the soldier's; she gave him a sharp look. The nerves of his face were fluttering like a moth's wing. Bother the fellow! Either he was yellow, or his nerves were in such a state that he was not fit to be in the Army. Queer, for a man who had been through Dunkirk—unless it was some sort of delayed shock; and if that was the case, they ought to have found it out before turning him out of the hospital. Rose pushed a packet of cigarettes quickly towards him.

"Get one of them between your teeth!" A nice thing, if he were to start a fit of hysteria in the shelter. How like Jo—to pick up a lame duck like this, and plant it on them!

The shelter was very well organised, each person having his allotted place. Susan began to open the deck chairs which belonged to the Timson party, while Jo stood, with her hands in the pockets of her tunic, taking all in with an air of lively interest.

Rose saw Bob fumbling in his pocket, saw him bring out a box of matches and strike one, after several attempts; she saw his hands jerking so much that he could not bring the flame in contact with the cigarette. Several people had begun to notice, their attention drawn by the presence of khaki; a very nervous old couple from the first floor were staring openly, the old lady's lip started to quiver. Damn him! thought Rose, about to hold the light for him, when Jo moved sharply. Standing so that her broad body made a barrier between the man and the watchers, she coolly whipped a cigarette from her own case, lit it, and, taking the one from between his lips, substituted it with her own: the whole manoeuvre performed so quickly and neatly, for Jo, that it was hardly noticeable. She stood there easily, covering him, smoking and chatting, while the others settled into their places.

It was a bad raid. Rose took it with outward stoicism, filling

a tot glass at intervals from her flask; once she passed the glass to the soldier—let that steady him! She did not look at him again. Susan, her arms folded on her bosom, seemed peacefully to sleep, but Rose knew that behind the ruddy, impassive mask, the thoughts raced parallel with her own. *Kay. Kay. God help Kay. God, look after Kay.*

Even Jo was impressed, when the sound of bombs confused itself with the thunder of the guns, and the bells of ambulances racing along the street overhead added their clamour to the infernal orchestration of the night. She sat on a rolled-up mattress beside the soldier, her elbows resting on her knees, her hands linked lightly together, her sturdy feet planted well apart. Her face was intent and serious; she, too, was thinking about Kay. It did not seem right, somehow, that she should be there, in safety, and Kay, somewhere, threading the horror of that night. There was too much tension in the shelter—shelters were known not to be infallible—for any one to notice that her thigh was wedged against the soldier's. At first she had felt his shivering, then, as the pressure of her own strong friendly body communicated its confidence to the weaker one, she felt it relax. Poor Bob. Rotten to feel like that, and have to go on being a soldier. Rotten to spend your life leave with all that din going on overhead.

There came a thud that rocked the foundations. One of the old couple gave a mouselike squeak, and someone's nerves crackled into a "God blast them!" Listening for some sequel to the shock, puzzled by the utter silence, Jo, her lips pursed for a whistle, looked across at her mother.

"That was a homely slosh, wasn't it? Think we've got any glass left?"

"We'll see presently, when it's over." Rose's eyes had gone to the soldier. His face was the colour of lead, and shone as if it had been greased; the sweat rolled down it and dripped on his tunic. In the dim light, a little black hole showed where his mouth should be.

Jo's eyes following the direction of her mother's, she spoke quickly.

"It gets pretty hot down here, doesn't it?"—an unfortunate observation, as for some reason the heating had failed, and most people were feeling chilly. Undaunted by looks that questioned her sanity, Jo rose cheerfully, unbuttoning her

tytic and letting out a puff of breath to emphasise her own wrath.

"Come on, Bob, let's go out on the stairs for a bit; I'll blow up if I stop down here much longer!"

Rose checked her protest; if the fellow was going to faint, he had better do it on the stairs—not start a panic among all these already jittery people. But Jo must be told there was to be no more picking up chance acquaintances—even if they wore khaki—and bringing them home on air raid nights.

The blue bulb on the stairs gave the faintest of glimmers. They stumbled up a couple of steps, then his knees gave way suddenly, and he crumpled against the wall. Jo's arms went round him, her hard hand pressed his head into her bosom.

"That's all right, Bob; you're all right. It's the heat. Go on! You'll be better if you don't try and hold it in. It was a smacker, wasn't it? Why, it scared the pants off *me*!—and I haven't been through half what you've taken——"

He snivelled, snatching at the poor rags of his pride.

"Oh, shut up!" . . . And, a little later, "I'm getting out of this. Go on, let me get out! I can't stick them, looking at me——!"

"Who's looking at you?" She clutched him back. "Who the hell are they, anyhow? A lot of windy old cows—they'd never notice if a bomb fell on the backs of our necks, so long as it didn't hit them!"

"No, I'm getting out." Again he struggled for freedom against the determined muscularity of Jo.

"I'll give you a half-arm under the jaw, my lad," she muttered fiercely, "if you don't shut up! Didn't I tell you Mummy's a nurse? She knows all about shell shock, and that sort of thing. Let's sit here"—she seemed partly to have reassured him—"and have another cigarette; I bet we're as safe here as in the shelter."

The raid was dying down, the gun salvos distant and scattered; but the All Clear had not yet gone, and no one, yet, made to move from the shelter; some had been caught that way before. The return to quiet was almost stupefying; silence battered on the ear-drums, the voices of wardens sounded faintly, calling from the street, there was a curious absence of others sounds.

On the stairs, under the blue bulb, he lay against her

shoulder, trustfully, quietly, like a child against its nurse. Somehow—he would not trouble to think how—she had drawn the shame out of him, given him back, for a while, his frail and wounded manhood.

"Jo . . ."

"Hallo, Bob."

". . . give me a kiss."

She felt her cheeks burn, the instinct of flight started in her. She looked helplessly, shamefully, up the stairs and down, instinct warning her that this would not be like other kisses—the hearty, homely busses on the cheek she had exchanged occasionally with youths as unsentimental as she was herself. She paused, conquering a sense both of fear and repulsion; then she turned fiercely, and fastened her mouth to his.

When Kay came off duty, she was met by shoals of glass, an unknown young man in khaki sweeping her bedroom floor, and her sister Jo with her sleeves rolled up and her arms plunged to the elbow in a bucket of grimy water. There was the usual stench of burning and soot, a thick layer of black powder over all the surfaces which Rose and Susan were tackling. The curtain and black-out trailed in rags from the broken rods that made a trellis with a blasted window frame. Kay stood in the doorway with her hands in the pockets of her overcoat, swaying a little with fatigue and laughing faintly.

"So we've caught it this time, have we? Gosh, what a filthy mess!"

Jo, on her hands and knees, looked up, her greeting arrested for a moment by the look on her sister's face. White, streaked with black from brow to chin, eyes red-rimmed with smoke and purple-ringed with weariness—it was yet a young face; it was Kay's face at seventeen—as if, thought Jo, the last few months had burnt away the years, burnt them back, burnt out all the superficial and left only the fine framework, the delicate cage of young aspiration, that was the seventeen-year-old Kay.

"Hallo. It'll be all right in a moment or two." Jo waved a vague arm that included the wreckage, the pail and the young man who, somewhat self-consciously, went on sweeping up glass. "Oh—this is Bob. We meant to get it done before you got in—your room caught it worst, and the sitting-room

—Susan's room is all right, and you're to go into her bed—
and we've cleaned up the bathroom, but the water hasn't come
on yet, and the bath's still full and all covered with
muck——!"

"Right-ho." Kay smiled, and nodded laconically to the
young man, who muttered a stiff "Pleased to meet you." She
and Jo left the room arm in arm for a tour of inspection;
Rose, her head tied up in a scarf and her dress covered with
an old cotton housecoat, came out of her bedroom, nodded—
"Ready for breakfast, dearie?" and went into the kitchen.

"Aren't you about done in?"

"Oh, I can use a cup of tea—then I'll lend a hand in here."
Kay was unbuttoning her overcoat; as she tried to draw her
arm out of the sleeve, Jo saw her wince. Another attempt
and her teeth sank grinning into her lower lip; she shook
her head. "Sorry; no can do!"

"What's up?"—Jo was alarmed.

"Ran the bus into a bit of a crater and jammed my
shoulder—that's all. Where's that tea?—I say, Jo, you look—
fine!" The tired eyes bathed Jo in admiring affection. "Got
a cigarette about you?—There's a horrid shortage of them up
I haven't had one since about six o'clock."

splutter and a gush from the bathroom; Susan calling to
say the water had come on; getting Kay's coat off, and then
her tunic and blouse, and discovering the swollen and dis-
coloured shoulder ("I'll see to that," from Rose); Kay being
helped to have her bath, cracking a few tight-lipped jokes,
and, finally being bullied into bed by Rose. . . .

Bob came on Jo behind a door, rubbing her head as though
something had hurt it. She gave him a dazed look.

"Lost something?" He shot one of his quick, unpleasantly
furtive looks past her—it was easy to see he wasn't popular
with the Old Girl—while his hand fumbled with a startling
familiarity for Jo's body. She leapt from him as though it had
stung her.

"Go on—and give Susan a hand in the kitchen—I'm going
to talk to my sister while she has her breakfast."

"Mummy." It was afternoon, and they were sitting together
in Rose's bedroom; Bob, to the latter's relief, had gone.
"Mummy . . . isn't it queer it should be Kay?"

"What do you mean, dearie?"

"It always used to be me. I mean—I was the tough one. And here am I, with a soft sort of job in the Army, and Kay's doing the real work. It feels—no, not wrong; but funny; as if Kay was the elder. . . ."

"But she is."

"Yes. But I've always been the elder, up to now," said Jo, slowly nodding her head.

About a month after Jo's leave ended, Rose received a letter.

" . . . What do you think? Bob's medical board turned him down again, and he's having a special neurological course at a place only a couple of miles from our camp. I expect Coventry, coming on top of Dunkirk, did it; coming home and finding he hadn't got a single, solitary thing left in the world—no family or anything. I understand it much better, because of that night in town. Well, it's nice his being there, because we see quite a bit of each other; it takes no time to hike over from the camp, and we've been to the pictures two or three times, and seen a bit of the country, which is lovely round here. Did you know the Somervells' place is quite close? They've given it over to the Red Cross for now, but we've been into the park, and it's just as Susan described it—the gates with the stone owls on top, and . . ."

"What do you make of that?" Rose passed the letter to Susan, who read it and passed it back calmly.

"She's having a good time, isn't she? Jo will always have a good time; she takes her happiness with her."

Rose made an impatient exclamation; it was not what she was asking for. But she said no more; if Susan was too stupid to see what she was getting at, she was not going to start a discussion. The following evening she said to Kay:

"What do you think of that fellow of Jo's?"

"What fellow?" Kay sounded genuinely surprised.

"The one she brought in here," said Rose shortly. Was every one except herself impenetrably stupid?—or had the war so focused them upon their own affairs that they had lost

their powers of perception? Kay knitted her brows, apparently in an effort of memory.

"Oh—that soldier. I don't know, Mummy—I hardly saw him."

"H'mph. Jo's seeing plenty of him."

"Is she?" The matter did not seem to interest Kay, scanning the evening paper.

"I didn't think much of him."

"Non-com, wasn't he, of some sort? I'm sorry, but I didn't really notice-him."

"Didn't Jo say anything about him to you?"

"I don't really remember—oh, I think she said something about picking him up in the train; he'd been bombed out, hadn't he? Nowhere to go for his leave, or something. You know Jo!"

"Yes, I know Jo." Rose spoke slowly; she was darning a stocking, but her hands had fallen to her knees. "The only worry that child's ever given me was over her soft-heartedness. All her life she's lapped up any hard-luck story like mother's milk. It scares me, sometimes, to think of the advantage people could take of her——"

"Why, Mummy dear!" This time Kay's attention was captured; she smiled, laid down the paper, and came and sat on the arm of Rose's chair, one long, graceful leg swinging in the badly-cut service trouser. "Don't tell me you're worrying about Jo's boy friends? Bless her, she's hard-headed enough when it comes to chaps! No man's ever going to mean as much to Jo as one of her puppies. Picking a man up in the train—that doesn't mean a thing to Jo; you've only got to look as if you've got a toothache, or nobody loves you, and Jo's maternal instinct gets into top gear and she starts mothering you! If Jo had got emotional about everybody she has ever done a good turn to, I hate to think what her life would be like by now!"

How much softer her laugh has grown! thought Rose. I used to think it was like glass tinkling, but now, somehow, it's gentle; it's warm; as if she had found out about life, and it has made her sorry. . . . About life? Or about death?

"That's all right, Katie." She herself spoke gently. "But in war time it's different. They get excited—and they are away from all their familiar surroundings——"

"Mummy darling." Kay's arm was round her neck. "Do you ever stop to remember how old we are, Jo and I, now? Jo's thirty-four, and I'm going on for thirty-seven. We're not a couple of children, torn from the schoolroom and hurled into the service of our country!"

That's just what you were, my darling, to all intents and purposes, when this war began, thought Rose, as her hand closed tightly over Kay's.

"And you've always said Jo's head was screwed on tighter than mine!"

"There's nothing like a man for loosening a screw."

"Not Jo's screws!—and this man you're talking about; I said I don't remember him, and I don't; but was there anything to remember? I got a sort of impression of some kind of a little clerk, or something, in civilian life—and you can't talk about the glamour of the King's uniform to a girl who lives in it!"

"You don't think she'll fall for him?" The tone betrayed her need of reassurance. Kay burst out laughing.

"Really, Mummy! Considering the chances she has had—if Jo was going to 'fall' she would have done it before now; and that little man's not the sort to make her alter her habit of mind."

"You're a good girl, Katie," sighed Rose, after a pause. She swung round suddenly, to face the girl on the arm of the chair. "There was a time I didn't think I'd ever be able to depend on you——"

"Well; can you now?"

Rose's eyes brimmed suddenly with tears; her hand gripped Kay's arm, then she rose briskly.

"It's time we were getting your food."

Kay's common sense, her coolness, her balance had succeeded in making Rose feel that she had made a fool of herself. Kay loved Jo as dearly as her mother did; Kay would be the first to worry, if there was anything to worry about. Kay—so strangely and suddenly finding her equilibrium in a world that, apparently, had lost its own! What did Kay think about, on nights when she drove her ambulance that the flames filled with their crimson dance?—past buildings that dissolved into clouds of dust even as she was passing,

along flat, familiar streets that had become rubble heaps,[†] pitted with the bomb craters? What did she think, when shrapnel scattered itself on the roof of her cab, when blast spun the driving wheel out of her hand, and gas from a blazing main shrieked up within feet of where she was waiting? Kay, who had never, before 1918 had never seen death or mutilation—how still was her face, when they loaded her ambulance with fragments that had once been human, when she took her part next morning in cleaning away the dreadful traces of the night before? Once, unable to resist, Rose put a clumsy question.

"Frightened, Mummy?—I should say we are! Until we get properly going. Then there isn't time to think of anything but getting there as fast as you can. But you should hear us swearing! I believe you'd have a fit, if you heard my language."

"It seems a very long time," said Rose, one day of the late spring, "since Jo had a leave?"

Her own days so full that she hardly marked the passage of time, it had come to her suddenly that all of four months gone by without seeing Jo, except for the few hours afforded by her twenty-four hour passes, most of which, since transport became so difficult, she spent in the train. On these brief occasions Jo, now mounting her chevron and a service stripe, seemed more mature; her talk was less of "good times," she allowed the work was hard, and, often, tedious. The sense of novelty and adventure was replaced by the hard determination to carry on, and, although as healthy as ever, and, if anything, a little stouter, she was evidently tired. She wanted very little but to sit, sleepily smiling and smoking, listening to the trivialities Rose and Susan collected for her: not "bomb stories." By the summer of 1919 the subject of air raids as a conversational topic had passed into the category almost of solecism. Most people had accepted their harsh inevitability, and turned for relief to wry little jests about food queues, about clothes rationing, about war-time restrictions on the civilian which were still novel enough to amuse, rather than to gail, their victims. In the middle of such conversations, Jo's head would drop on her breast, she would

fall asleep; and Rose, quietly moving a pillow to give her more ease, felt grateful for that honest sleep, result only of healthy fatigue.

All London was tired, in 1941; worn out by its disturbed nights, its day and night-time tension, its unaccustomed difficulties of transport, and, most of all, perhaps, by the endless waste of time caused by damaged communications and the seeming impossibility of making plans. It had not yet got its second wind. Particularly women of Rose's and Susan's age were tired; carrying on her profession, and filling in such free time as she had with work for the Red Cross, Rose no longer had the Rolls to pop into, Judd to drive her in comfort home. An appointment in Hampstead or Ealing meant a long struggle with trains and buses, for taxis were already beginning to disappear, at any rate from outlying parts of the town. She had practically given up out-of-town work, for she found herself no longer equal to the long standing on crowded platforms, while the troop trains and trucks of war material went trundling through.

Yes, it was a different war from the last one. The sparkle of hectic gaiety that informed London in the years between 1914 and 1918 was conspicuous by its absence; those who had "kept the home fires burning" last time were fled to the North and West; were finding their outlet in the corruption of little villages in the deep countryside. Mayfair stood empty, battered and shuttered; she looked up at the façades of houses she had known, often to see nothing but a charred and broken shell. None of her soft, luxury-seeking patrons remained; if they had done so, she would have had no time for them. Her face often grey with fatigue, her lips compressed by the force of her effort, Rose went about her mission, and wondered, sometimes, what to do with the money she was making. She put all she dared into War Loan, but there were no longer safe ways of getting money out of the country, and some strange reluctance possessed her to investing in armaments. So she carried ridiculous sums about with her: inside her corsets, pinned to her underclothing, in wash-leather bags suspended round her waist under her skirt. She felt sometimes as if she stank of money, and realised its uselessness; for already there was nothing of value to her that money would buy, and there was going to be less. The anticipated

security and comfort of her old age had departed from her, and each day she felt her resilience grow less and less. The ribaldries still came from her lips, but she forced them there; they no longer rose spontaneously from what had seemed the inexhaustible well of her optimism.

It was because of a sudden wish for Jo, for her stolid companionship and cheerful endurance, that she got out her diary and found how long it was since she had had her at home for more than a few short hours.

Eventually a letter came.

"DARLING MUMMY,—I've got a confession to make. I did have my leave, and I went down to Falmouth. I wasn't going to tell you, because I thought you would be hurt, but when I got your letter I felt there was nothing to do but make a clean breast of it. Bob doesn't want me to, because he thinks you will misunderstand, but I think I know you better than that!

"You see, Bob got his discharge from the neurological place at that same time as I got my leave, and they gave him five days before rejoining his battalion. He hadn't got anywhere to go, and nobody in particular to spend it with. So I suggested we took it together. He's due for overseas anyhow, and when he gets his embarkation leave I may not be free, so it seemed rather rotten he shouldn't have one good time. Knowing the sort of ideas you get in your noddle (!), I may tell you that I stopped at the Greenbank, and Bob got a room in the town. We had a grand time, Mummy; sailing and bathing and dancing nearly every day.

"Now, I suppose you are wondering if there's anything between Bob and me. Well, it's no good saying until after the war. I don't know. We've never talked about it. Neither of us is young—he's four years younger than me—and I suppose we don't either of us feel like tying the other up, until we can see a little way ahead. I don't suppose Bob is exactly the sort of person you have imagined as a son-in-law. Well, I don't know that I've imagined marrying any one like Bob either. But war-time, and living in a crowd like this, gives one a different set of ideas. I don't know that one's standards alter fundamentally, they

just don't seem so important. One is readier to accept other people's values, and to allow they're just as good, in their way, as one's own.

"I do want you thoroughly to understand, Mummy, that there's no question of an engagement. Bob does not even know what his circumstances will be, after the war. As a matter of fact, he hardly ever speaks of the future; I haven't ever met anybody who seems so determined to live in the present. I think he feels the past doesn't bear thinking about—I still don't know a thing about his home at Coventry—and that it isn't worth while considering the future, which he may never live to see. I do so understand this point of view, and all I want is for him to feel that while we're together we're having a good time, and if we can't make it work after the war, at any rate we'll have this to remember. Of course I haven't said anything to him about having money of my own, because I don't think it would go down very well. I don't think he's got anything at present but his army pay. So if all this just peters out, like so many war-time friendships do, don't blame anybody, will you, as we are quite old enough to know where we are doing and behave sensibly about it.

"I don't think I am what most people could call 'in love,' but I feel Bob wants looking after, and . . ."

"Oh, my God!"

Kay, off duty for the day, and patching the torn belt of an overall, looked up startled at her mother's groan.

"I knew it!" Rose spoke passionately.

Kay came and took the letter from her hand. Having read it, she laid it down thoughtfully on the table.

"Well, Mummy, I seem to have been wrong."

"Of course you were wrong! And I knew it at the time," snapped Rose.

"Well—I suppose, if Jo wants to marry him——"

"Marry! They're living together—of course!"

Kay slowly shook her head.

"No, Mummy. I don't think so. In fact, I'm sure Jo wanted to make it clear they aren't, when she put in that bit about the Greenbank Hotel."

"Don't be idiotic! A fellow doesn't go away with a girl unless he means to sleep with her—and if he does, I don't think much of him," Rose was goaded to reply: "What do you take them for? A couple of pansies?"

"No, but, for one thing, I don't think Jo would do it. She's almost—prim, about that sort of thing."

"Human nature's human nature, my girl," was the grim retort. "And I've never marked any lack of humanity about Jo."

"Would you really mind it very much, Mummy," said Kay quietly, "if either of us lived with a man we weren't married to?"

"Of course I'd mind it! I haven't brought you up that way, Kay, and you know it."

"Lots of people do, and it seems to work all right. Not that I think it would with Jo. Yes, with Jo it would be marriage or nothing. I shouldn't worry, Mummy: except about whether Jo will be happy or not. It's funny, to think of Jo—married!"

"Married! You saw him; I ask you, is that the sort of man ~~to~~ make a husband for Jo?"

"I suppose we all have our own tastes. You thought I'd got pretty funny taste, sometimes!"

"And so you had. But at least, you'd got enough common sense not to marry them. I don't know what's wrong with you two!" Rose leaned back in her chair, exasperated. "You've both had every advantage; neither of you is bad-looking; you, in particular, have met all sorts of people—and you're an old maid at thirty-seven, and Jo waits until she's thirty-five to make a fool of herself over a bit of chewed string in trousers that she thinks 'wants looking after'!"

"Well, Mummy, it's what we ought to have expected, from Jo! The only wonder is it didn't happen before."

"I'd have seen it didn't happen before! It wouldn't have happened now, if she had been at home with me to look after her," said Rose, bitterly.

"It's just—war," Kay answered.

"*Damn* the war!"

"I shouldn't upset yourself, Mummy dear, until we've seen I believe you'll find it's all right."

"Do you think she'd tell me, if it wasn't?"

"No," said Kay quietly. "But she might tell me."

But Jo, when she arrived home, was not at all averse from discussing the matter.

"I know Bob didn't show up very well, the night he spent here." She looked at Rose straightly. "He was tired, and I expect we made him shy. He's very diffident, with strangers. And you can't blame him for being shot away, after all he'd been through."

"I'm not talking about blame. I'm talking about you, at your age, thinking of marrying a little neurotic, undersized nobody——"

The crimson crept darkly up Jo's cheek; she bit her lip, while Rose finished the sentence.

"I thought your dog-breeding would have taught you better than that! Whatever sort of children you think you'll get from——"

"Mummy!—I've told you, we aren't thinking about marrying. Whether you believe it or not, Bob's never even mentioned marriage to me."

"I thought as much!"

"Or anything else either!" Jo defied her. "It's simply a very good friendship, and I wish you wouldn't spoil it by—by accusing us of things——"

"Jo," said Rose, "are you telling me the truth?"

"Of course I am."

"Well," said Rose, and brought her hands down on the table, "all I can say is, I don't understand young people nowadays."

Despite her hurt, a laugh broke from Jo.

"But I keep telling you, Mummy!—We're not young people. I'm thirty-five, which people used to consider middle-aged, not so long ago. Bob's thirty-one. If we haven't got some sort of sense of responsibility now, we never will!"

"And what's this Bob—oh, for goodness' sake, what's his other name? I won't call him Bob——!"

"Jones," said Jo calmly.

Rose stared, then burst into ironic laughter.

"Jo Jones!—Oh, don't be silly."

"I was christened Josephine," answered Jo, with dignity.

"Not that it would matter. If you can't get over thinking about us in terms of white satin and orange blossoms and *Voice that breath'd o'er Eden* (you'd never get Bob into striped pants), it's no use going on talking about it. I don't really know why we are, anyhow; it's my business, not any one else's."

"What's this Bob Jones do, when he's not in the Army?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," was the cool reply. "I don't suppose you'll understand it; but that's the way we are friends. The Army kind of—blots out everything that's gone before, and makes everybody equal. I tell him about my past, sometimes, because it was jolly, and I like talking about it; but I sort of gather that Bob wasn't very happy. Generally we talk about what is going on around us; Bob is interested in scenery, and—in historical monuments. He quite likes animals——"

"My—God!" Rose leaned back and looked at Jo as if she had come to the conclusion that the latter had taken leave of her senses. Actually, she had come very near the point of believing that there was nothing in the thing after all; that Jo, who, after all, as she said, was thirty-five, was indulging in some exaggeration, some sentimental illusion such as was not uncommon in spinsters who had never had a love affair. It was better, she consoled herself, than striking up some red-hot friendship with a woman—the usual alternative.

"Oh well," she was obliged to content herself with saying, "I suppose you know your own business, and there's nothing for me to do but let it alone."

"I'd be very glad if you would, Mummy."

A little more than a month later, Jo wrote that Bob had had his embarkation leave and gone to Africa.

"She doesn't say if she spent it with him or not!"

"How could she?" Kay pointed out. "She hadn't got any leave."

"I bet she wangled something."

"Oh, I expect they saw each other. But wangling isn't so easy, unless you have a proper excuse. They aren't engaged."

"Thank God. Well, let's hope that's the end of that."

"Poor Jo," said Kay quietly.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE winter of 1941, the third winter of the war, Kay had bronchitis and a long sick leave, part of which she spent at Cissie's down at Sunningdale. She saw only glimpses of Cissie, who was away most of the time, on long, provincial tours, giving troop concerts, doing an occasional turn on the B.B.C. Her trouper's spirit carried her over the discomforts of war-time travelling, for she would never spare herself for the "boys"—the new generation of "boys," who, not having known Cissie in the glories of her prime, were, first sceptical, then puzzled, and ended by surrendering completely to the time-honoured technique she flung at them with the same splendid assurance with which she had flung it at their fathers and grandfathers. Among revue stars, torch-singers and "pin-up girls," Cissie more than held her place, but it was a tired old woman who, when her journeys allowed, dragged herself back to Sunningdale, as she expressed it, "to lick her wounds," and to gather fresh resources of the courage which, more than physical strength, now carried her through her public appearances.

Propped up on her lace-covered pillows, her hair netted in silver, her hands emerging like tiny jewelled claws from the ruffled sleeves of her bed-jacket, the wise old woman let Kay talk—a privilege for which the latter was grateful, for, during the enforced idleness of her illness, she had felt the crumbling of the defences she had raised against the world of nightmare in which she had had her being during the years '40 and '41. It was the sweetest relief to talk it all out with Cissie; to watch the wise, dark eyes and the almost imperceptible nod with which, from time to time, Cissie affirmed her understanding. It was like getting rid of a dose of poison; and one felt none of the sense of guilt, of "spreading fear and despondency" one had in talking to almost any other person; for Cissie's moral strength was such that she flung it off, and one knew there was no horror within human conception that had power to bruise that lofty and courageous spirit.

"I couldn't tell Mother things like that . . ."

"Of course you couldn't. She's in the thick of it all, while I'm just gaddin' round, like an old Aunt Sally, makin' a fool of meself because it's all I'm good for. Jesus-God! If I'd bin forty years younger——!"

"Cissie! You know it's people like you who are keeping us sane in days like these. I wish you'd have Mother down here for a while, and make her rest."

"How is she?"

Kay hesitated before answering.

"You know Mummy. On the face of things, you'd say she was taking it all in her stride; but she's just too brisk, too snappy, to be convincing. We've got to face it; Mummy's an old woman. Where she used to be tough, she's now brittle. And this fool breakdown of mine hasn't made it any better for her."

Under the lowered lids, the heavily beaded lashes, Cissie's eyes shot their dark, piercing look.

"You're a marv'lous kid, Kay."

"Oh, for the love of God!" Kay's lips twitched into an unsteady smile. "I've told you I'm shot away, scared, pulped—ready to scream at the idea of going back to it again! Don't tell me I'm marvellous; it doesn't make sense."

"Yes, it does." Cissie was obstinate. "You were a regular spoilt, pampered kid when I first came across you, and this dam' war has been the makin' of you. Of course, you're marv'lous. You've got it from your mother. She's a marv'lous woman."

"Perhaps we all are, in these days." Kay relaxed against the foot of the bed and closed her eyes. "We've got to be. Yes, Mother's wonderful. But it's getting her down. I wish I could persuade her to give up her work and come down here again, into the country. God knows she's had her whack, and earned her rest, by now!"

"She wouldn't be happy. No one—if they've got anything about them—could be happy if they were out of it all. Of course she's tired. We're all tired. You're tired. I'm tired—so tired, I sometimes feel as if I've been dead for weeks, and it isn't me, but just my ghost, walkin'! The old ghost, goin' on in motley, makin' people laugh, because it can't find anything better to do! But when it's all over—don't forget: it'll be the other people who will be tired. Tired of them—

selves. Because they've missed the procession. 'Have you ever watched a procession?' asked Cissie, inconsequently. "It's hell. I've seen three Royal funerals an' three coronations, and I can't count the weddin's. For the first hour it's lovely; then your backside starts to ache, and the sun gets in your eyes, and there's some dam' woman next you wearin' 'a perfume you can't stand; and you want to get away, but you can't, for the crowds. And when you do get away you're a wreck; but you wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world!"

"That's how the people will be who've ratted on this war. Nobody'll want them. Their country and their friends, and the generation that comes after them won't have time for them. We've learned a new language, and they won't know it when they come back. They'll still be talking the old one. And nobody'll know or care what they're sayin'."

The room filled with a curious glow of sunset, and Kay, taking the yellow light full on her drained face, was a long time silent before she spoke again.

"You know, there's the clinic, Cissie. Mummy could do such a lot with that—and with helping to look after evacuees."

"Enough people on that already, my dear: people without half the spirit and stamina of your mother. I suppose what you really want's to get her out of the air raids?"

"I honestly don't see why she should go on taking them. We've got most of the windows out, now, and the flat's like an ice-house. It's no place for a woman of Mother's age."

"And what 'ud you do, supposin' she left town?"

"Me? Oh, I might stay on at the flat, or get into some hostel. I'd be all right," Kay defied her.

"You're cuckoo." Cissie's lips pursed into a smile. "Don't you know what your mother's main war job is?—It's lookin' after you. And if I'd got a daughter, I'd feel the same. You and I, dear—we don't know what it's like, bein' a mother. I never had any kids; hadn't the time. In the old days, women used to give their sons to the country; now it's the girls. In lookin' after you, Rose is doin' her bit, and you bet she knows it! Why—Lord save us! A panzer column wouldn't get her out of town, while you're drivin' your silly ambulance!"

"Oh, hell," muttered Kay. "It sounds as if I ought to give it up."

"Don't be a little ass. It's the glory of Rose's life."

"Well . . . She's got Jo in the A.T.S., to be her glory!"

Not the same thing. You're the King Pin, and you know
What's more, Jo knows it as well."

Kay moved restlessly.

"I know she does. I wish she didn't. It's so unfair." She hesitated, before adding, "You know, Cissie, I can't help feeling, sometimes, that—between the pair of us—Jo's never had a square deal."

"By the way—how's her young man?"

"Do—do you know about him?" This came as a shock.

Cissie nodded.

"Gave a concert at the camp—when was it? Three—four months ago? Always get 'em mixed up: one camp's just like another. You know—mud; and starting like an ice-house, and endin' up like the scullery on mother's washin' day. And all the poor kids' faces, with their white teeth, liftin' up towards the stage—lookin' as if somebody's promised 'em a treat if they're good. It gives me a feelin' I'd like to cry. . . . Well, I looked down, and there was Jo, with a bunch of A.T.S., in the row behind the officers. We grinned at each other and nodded. After the show was over, she came round, 'Engin' this chap with her"—Cissie paused and frowned.

What did you make of him?"

"Well . . ." Cissie's hands, no larger than a small child's, on which the rings now hung so loosely that she was always dropping them, plucked uneasily at the pink angora of the bedspread. "I like—well, when a chap's got a girl with him, I like to see him walk chesty. I like to see him take the lead, and show the girl that he's the one that wears the trousers. That's what a woman wants, Kay: especially a woman like Jo, that wears all this hombray stuff to hide the fact that she's just pure feminine underneath."

"You—didn't care for him?" said Kay slowly.

"What was there to care for?—A snipey-faced little runt, looking out of the corners of his eyes, with nothing to say for himself! I know a shy boy when I meet him, and I like 'em shy. I know how to make 'em open up and get to feel homey with me. Mostly they're shy at first, when they meet Cissie May!" She chuckled gently, then her brows drew together again. "But I couldn't get ahead with that fellow

of Jo's. I don't often take a dislike to a boy, but I felt raw with him for lettin' Jo down——"

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, by his manner. By not standin' up and lookin' proud of her. By not lookin' me in the eye, by mutterin' and mumblin' whenever she tried to make him do his stuff—know what I mean? I wanted to say to him, You got a dam' fine girl there—what do you mean to do about it?"

"Well," sighed Kay, after a pause, "he's in Africa now. So perhaps it'll all blow over."

"M'm." Cissie sounded dubious. "She said he was going on embarkation leave next day. Jesus-God! The things love does to us women!"

"You really think he's in love with him?"

"Love?—it was sprouting out of her ears. I could have taken and shaken her! Why can't we run that sort of thing out of our systems with a good dose of castor oil? That's what my poor old mother used to give me, when she saw the symptoms. A lot of use it was! But at least I went in for good lookers!" ended Cissie, on a note of complacency which brought the smile to Kay's anxious lips.

"Mummy didn't care for him either."

"What?" shrieked Cissie. "She had the nerve to take him home?"

Kay related the story of the night of the raid, Cissie glowering.

"Well, I'm surprised at Rose! If I'd been her, I'd have had Jo across my knee."

"Uniform and all?—I don't suppose she took it seriously; knowing Jo, who would?"

"Knowing Jo, who wouldn't?" snapped Cissie. "Mark my words"—she shot a quick, sidelong look at Kay and checked herself. The girl had enough on her plate already, without loading her up about Jo. "You're a funny kid, Kay. Why haven't you got married?"

Kay shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh—one thing and another."

"Ever been in love?"

"Once a fortnight, more or less!" jibed Kay.

"Go on. I mean—in love," persisted Cissie. Kay recognised the futility of resistance.

"That way . . . once."

"Something went wrong, dear?" Cissie settled down comfortably to the sympathy of which she was past-mistress. "I suppose he was married?"

Kay nodded.

"It's a common complaint. But"—winked Cissie—"it ain't incurable!"

"It was in this case. I happened to be only fifteen."

"Oh——?" Cissie stared, then thrust the pillows out of her way with an expression of disgust. "Pooh! Calf love!"

"No." Kay leaned forward. "No, Cissie. That's what most people would say; but not you—please! It was real. And nothing else of the kind has ever been real since. At least I've had enough sense to recognise that!" Even to the incredulous Cissie, her manner was sufficiently serious to compel belief.

"Well—if it had been anybody but you . . ." She accepted it with a shrug, reluctantly. "I guess we can't all be made alike—and I always told Rose it was no good treatin' you like an ordinary kid. Sure you've not made a mistake, dear? It's nice, you know, to have a home and husband and kids of your own."

Dear Cissie, preaching the creed she had herself forsworn! Smiling, Kay leaned over and picked up the claw-like little hand.

"Sure . . . now. Lovin's better than being in love. You know that yourself. It's more use to other people."

The evening post brought a letter from Lydia Roden. Kay read it in the hall, surprised by her own calm. Of course: she had known it. Ever since the small, red-haired girl from Lancashire joined the post. Ever since she came on the pair of them drinking in the near-by local. Just for a moment, she had felt terribly sick, then she knew she was too tired to make a fuss. This must just be allowed to go on its way, like others of Lydia's fancies. Oddly enough, it was her own indifference—only the outcome of physical and moral weariness—that had postponed it: Lydia, who revelled in a scene, abandoning, in her astonishment, her new *béguin*, for the sake of plumbing the mystery of Kay's lethargy. Then, of course, with the latter's absence on sick leave, the inevitable had happened. . . .

A year ago, this would have laid me flat, Kay was thinking. Now, only a kind of numbness, followed by relief. She found

herself analysing her emotions, as she carefully tore the letter into small pieces, and dropped them into a brass bowl standing in the hall. She walked out on the steps, to look out over the mild English landscape, shaken by the vibration of a squadron of bombers passing overhead. Everything mad, shaken, pulled out of perspective and defocused, by war-time. Jo . . .

What was it Cissie had intended to say? "Mark my words . . ." Cissie—*Cissie* taking this affair of Jo's seriously? But—but it was ridiculous! Unless—are we all mistaken about Jo? Is Jo wearing all that cheerfulness and courage like a glaze over something sad and lonely that we've never troubled to understand? Is it possible she's keeping something to herself—Jo, who always tells everything?

Susan had gone to the pictures. One kept on doing things like that, even in the middle of war—sitting in the dark, with an organ dropping lush goutts of sentiment, anodyne to jaded nerves; concentration ebbing and flowing between the screen and one's thoughts. How many of those spectators who packed the cinemas for every session knew what the pictures they saw were about? Scenes, incidents flashed into perception, were blotted out in the dark, fulminating contents of the watchers' minds. Cinemas were used to sit down in, to sleep in, to weep in; for a few they provided escape into a world of romance from a world of reality.

Rose let herself into the flat and switched on the light—although it was broad daylight out of doors. But most of the glass was now replaced by pasteboards, and such comfort as the apartment contained was mainly concentrated in her bedroom; the sitting-room was uninhabitable, with part of an outer wall boarded up and the chimney-breast piled on the hearth. Another flat had been found in a service block in Hill Street; it was merely a matter of having to wait until the existing tenants could arrange for removal. Storage was hardly to be had, vans and men were at a premium. Rose had considered removing into a hotel—that would have been inevitable, if Kay had been at home; but Kay, fortunately, was still at Sunningdale. They had now found a little patch on one of her lungs which, with luck, would take her out of the service. Susan's narrow divan had been pushed into a corner

of the hall, and the two women continued to live there, in a state of discomfort preferable, at least to Rose, to the hotel life she detested. "It's worse in Russia," was her favourite observation; it was fortunate that she shared with Susan a prejudice for the privacy of her own home.

She had turned on the electric fire and opened the *Radio Times*, when the door opened and Kay walked in.

"Good gracious child, what on earth are you doing here?"

Kay's arm was round her shoulder; they kissed, and Kay looked with a grimace round the little room, crowded with odds and ends of furniture collected from the rest of the flat.

"It's more like, what are *you* doing here? Mummy dear, you really must move out. It's quite absurd, your staying on in this mess. You might as well be in a junk store."

"I'm all right," said Rose stubbornly. "They tell me I'll be able to get into Hill Street next month. Well, Katie, it's nice to see you—you're looking better, my dear. What does the doctor say?"

To think I should be *glad* of Katie's having something the matter with her lungs! It would happen now, of course. Why couldn't it have happened in '39, when we could have got her into Switzerland? She's always had that tuberculous look, but they wouldn't have it there was anything the matter with her. Doctors—sod 'em all! What's the good of a medical board?

"I'm just going to make a cup of tea, but I didn't want to miss Cissie's broadcast. Turn it on, there's a dear; she'll be on in a minute."

Kay thought, This is like something in a dream, or in a play—as Rose bustled out of the room. This isn't real. Here we go on, doing all the usual things, talking in our usual voices, listening to the radio, and . . . the switch clicked; the small panel filled with light. Someone's talk roared out—on fuel economy. She adjusted the volume.

Her own figure faced her from the glass of the wardrobe; thin, tall, rather shadowy in the grey, pre-war tailormade; her face, pale, anonymous—surely not her face? How one altered without knowing—until one day . . . Of course, while she had been down in the country, her hair had not been dyed; it was soft, rather ashen in colour, in a loose, wavy crop round her head—a style that took no trouble to dress or keep up,

that most of the girls had taken to, on the ambulance post. Oddly enough, it made her look younger, not older.

She slid a hand slowly into her pocket, seeking cigarettes, encountered a folded sheet of paper, felt her finger and thumb close on it tightly, relinquish it, and draw out her cigarette case. Yes, one just went on—doing the usual things.

When Rose returned with the tray, someone's signature tune was on. The electric kettle was plugged into the power beside the hearth; Kay crouched over the fire, sitting, like a Kaffir, on her high heels; the room felt chilled, dank, cheerless—and, in some way, empty, for all its overcrowding. How did her mother ever stand it? Desultory conversation passed, while some turns went on—brash sentiment, brash humour: B.B.C. conception of entertainment for the masses. Judging from the studio applause, the B.B.C. was right.

"Are you stopping for dinner, Katie? I'd better ring up and get a table for the three of us, if you are."

"Why, Mummy, aren't you and Susan eating at home?"

"We don't go in for much of a meal in the evenings. I get a good lunch out—I don't care for two big meals a day."

"I hope you're eating enough." Kay frowned; it was evident that Rose was very thin.

"Good heavens, child—yes! We'll get a table at the Knightsbridge Hotel, and I'll join you there at eight."

"You've not got to go out again this evening?"

"Bless your soul, there's no closing hours in my job!" Rose laughed shortly and raised her hand as the nauseating bonhomie of the announcer's voice succeeded a burst of swing.

"There's no need to introduce our next singer—the great little lady who's as much a part of the British Constitution as the Houses of Parliament! What she sings to-day we all sing to-morrow—and here she is, with a new number specially written for boys and girls in the Forces all over the world. Cis-sie MAY!"

The yells, the whistles, the applause roared out over the first notes of the band. Rose sat still, with a smile curving her lips. Yes, that was it: the blare of the band, the jolly, rowdy music that suggested the old-fashioned music hall, the saloon bar, the swirl of tobacco smoke—the good times before decadence set in with negro rhythm and the blues, and Broadcasting House took the guts out of entertainment by catering

for the Nonconformist masses! She felt moisture come into her eyes, as she looked across at Kay—poor Katie! who didn't even know what they were like, those grand days which had passed while she was only a little girl; Katie, who had never sat in a red plush seat at the old Holborn Empire to hear Cissie's voice—the voice of the little bar at the Haymakers, of the girls on the street corners, of the champagne corks popping at Flora's and the lads whispering hoarsely to their wenches behind the hedgerows at Crowle. Not a human emotion or experience that did not collect itself into that rich voice of Cissie's—that trumpet of tarnished gold, that rang above the band, bidding men be men and women women, under cover of some tawdry ballad. The B.B.C. might sterilise the words—they could not castrate the voice, that drew its inspiration straight from the womb of nature, and carried its steadfast message past the frontiers of State-controlled morality, straight to the human souls that listened.

"Turn it off," muttered Rose, while the applause was still ringing in the studio. Kay stretched out her arm; the panel darkened; there was silence. "We don't want anything else—after Cissie."

"I wish I'd heard her, Mummy, when she was in what they call her 'prime.'"

"It wasn't so different." Rose paused a moment to consider. "She still makes you feel what she gave you then: a sort of feeling that, whatever comes, you can take it. That was Cissie's secret: she put heart into you. She'd got so much herself—you just had to rise up and meet her on her own level. I'll tell you something"—Rose paused in the act of putting on her coat—"if there'd been somebody like Cissie May in Germany, that house-painting bastard would never have been allowed to get up and start this war."

"Mummy—where are you going?"

"I've told you—I've got another job to do before I come back for dinner."

"Mummy . . ."

Kay was standing, facing her. Rose felt her heart miss a beat.

"What is it, Katie?"

"You haven't asked me why I'm here."

"No," said Rose. "No," she repeated slowly. Her eyes

were fixed, almost forbiddingly, on her daughter. "If there's anything the matter, it will have to wait until I come back. I've only got a quarter of an hour to be over at Bayswater."

"It—won't—wait," whispered Kay.

Rose bit her lip.

"Now, Katie; you know work's work. People are doing war jobs; they can't go shifting times about for other people's convenience." She spoke with a sharp, irritable violence, deliberately putting off—putting off what? Her own fear angered her; she wanted to call out, "Oh, whatever it is, Katie, let it alone! I've had enough lately. I tell you——!"

Kay was holding out a folded sheet of paper.

"What's this?"

"Read it, please."

Rose glanced at the writing.

"From Jo?"

Kay nodded.

"What's the matter with her? When did you get this?"

"This morning."

Kay had risen to her feet. Her elbow groped for the support of the mantelpiece. She found another cigarette, and lit it with a forced nonchalance. She did not look at Rose.

"Well?" said Rose. Her face was hard, implacable, as if she would not accept the prompting of her brain, of her heart.

"I've just been with her."

"Well? For God's sake . . . Katie?"

Kay made some blind movement, which Rose parried; her stiff hands, laid on the girl's shoulders, thrust her a little away from her. There was a pause. Kay heard her mother cross the room; heard the "ping" of the telephone in the sitting-room, as the receiver was lifted.

"I'm sorry, I can't make it this evening. To-morrow at the same time?—Right; I'll be there.—No, of course twenty-four hours doesn't make any difference! All right, my dear, keep smiling! Nonsense, you'll be laughing your head off before the week's out."

Kay started, as Rose appeared again suddenly at her side.

"Now. This is true? She's got herself into trouble?"

Kay nodded.

"He won't marry her?"

"He's in Africa. Anyhow, how can he? He's married."

"How do you know?"

"He told Jo, just before he went away."

"And you mean to say the little fool let him——?"

"She's in love with him, Mummy. He told her after it happened—it was the night she went to see him, before his embarkation leave. He told her then because—oh well, I suppose because he was scared."

"Ay, he'd got something to be scared about." Rose spoke with concentrated bitterness. A sudden thought struck her; Kay saw a pulse throb in her mother's temple, the crepitation that ran under the thin, greying skin at either side of her mouth. "But that's more than four months ago! . . . Katie?"

"She thought it was going to be all right. I mean, she seemed to be normal—you know it can happen——"

Rose lifted her hand in an authoritative gesture.

"Where is she?"

"She's in town. She came up to see a doctor, to make sure Well . . . she's sure."

"The little fool. The *damned* little fool."

"Somebody's given her an address. She's going there to-morrow unless——"

"An address?" Rose repeated.

"Somewhere off Shaftesbury Avenue. One of those—places. I knew you'd be shocked, Mummy. She made me swear I wouldn't tell you. But you know the awful things that can happen."

"How should I know?" flamed Rose.

Kay went on, stumbling desperately.

"You must know somebody—the right sort of person—not one of those awful quacks. You must know—you must know——"

You must know. She felt her world dissolving. It was like losing one's grip on a lifeline and being carried down a swift stream. *You must know . . .*

CHAPTER FOUR

SHE FELT the blood beating up into her head, the veins of her throat swelling and her heart threatening to choke her. Never, in her bold, independent life, had Rose Timson known fear as she knew it in this moment: known it so intimately that she was forced to recognise it for what it was. An obscure rage took hold of her, along with her fear: What's going to happen to me? *To me . . . ?*

She who had so often rallied other women in similar plight, making robust light of their distress, honestly assured of her own righteousness and reason, pitying them in her heart for their weak surrender to convention—"Why, what about it? What's a little mishap of that sort in these days? Good gracious me, there's a war on!" All those easy and flippant phrases, together with her common sense, failed, now they concerned herself. For this—this, she made no bones about it, spelt ruin. I—I of all people, with a fatherless grandchild; it's crazy. It's some sort of awful joke. It's somebody making a fool of me. It's not true. Katie, tell me it's not true.

This pale, useless girl opposite to me. . . . The nails bit into the sweating palms of Rose's hands. Shall I tell Katie? I can't bear this by myself; I swear to God I can't bear it. Katie, can't you see what you've done to me?

Pale and useless and scared; *what I've made her*. My girl—that I've brought up to be all that I'm not myself. I've broken the law of England to buy you immunity, Katie. Immunity from what? From your responsibilities of being born a woman. I've kept you out of my life; I can't suddenly snatch you into it now. I can't expect you to understand. . . . My God, I'm alone! I can't tell a living soul. I'm caught; I'm trapped; I'm done for.

Again the rage in her brain fluttered wildly, like a blue-bottle fly, beating itself against a window pane. All I've done for these two girls—and this is what I get for it! Jo, the "easy" one, the one who could "look after herself!" The damned little fool—getting herself into this mess, and involving her family in it. . . . I'll have nothing to do with it—

nothing! How can I? And at her age——! An age when it is not only ridiculous for a girl—woman—to have a baby, it was risky as well. These hard, muscular girls—women—always came off worse than the soft, drooping sort that had never toughened themselves up with sports and exercise. Of course you can't have your baby, you little fool; but don't ask me anything about it! Don't dare to ask me!

From a great distance came Kay's frightened voice.

"She's been taking all sorts of things . . . I tell her she'll hurt herself . . ."

Oh, hold your tongue, Katie, what do you know about it?

" . . . no use, are they? I mean, they won't, after the second or third month, will they . . .?"

"Whose idea's this?—the Shaftesbury Avenue place—yours or Jo's?"

"Why, Mummy, she got it from one of the other girls on the gun site—I don't know anything about those things! But it's horribly dangerous, isn't it? You do know somebody, don't you——?"

"Of course I don't know anybody!" Her voice snapped with nervousness. "How should I know anybody? Good God, yes, you know that sort of thing's illegal——"

"It's being done all the time. You *must* have heard of someone . . ."

"Oh, stop parroting 'You must have heard,' Katie!—There used to be a well-known man on the Continent"—Rose moistened her dry lips, and tried to marshal her self-possession—"but he died some years ago. You know what it is in England; the penalties are too heavy for reputable people to dabble in that game."

"I don't know whether they're reputable or not, I know they are doing it."

Rose looked at her sharply.

"You want Jo to have this operation, don't you?"

"Well—what else is there to do? I mean, how *could* Jo go round with a baby——? I mean, it's not even like it was before the war—registration and food cards and all that kind of thing: she can't even get away with calling herself Mrs. Something—tradespeople and servants, they all see the cards; we haven't got any personal privacy left, in these days," Kay said bitterly.

Rose had sat down at the table. She rested her elbow on it, and her fingers drummed the polished wood as she gave Kay a curious look.

"And how much of all that did you say to Jo?"

"She said most of it to me," Kay muttered. "Mummy"—she looked up; her mouth hung open, aghast at the expression on Rose's face—"Mummy, you're not going to refuse to help her, are you?"

A laugh came from Rose, so terrible in its mirthlessness that Kay involuntarily started.

"Help her?—Or help you?—Or help—me? It's all right, Katie; I understand. You're not cut out for the part of aunt to a soldier's little by-blow! Don't look like that, child. I'm not blaming you. Whatever you are, I'm the one responsible."

Kay's face was white; under their lowered lids, her eyes were ringed with darkness; the full lower lip purple, as though she had bitten it. After a pause, her reply came, in a smothered voice.

"Then you're responsible for Jo as well. If you feel like that—for God's sake, Mummy, aren't you going to help her?"

You've done it. Times without number you've done it—in circumstances for which the law would condemn, and any doctor in the land exonerate you. And what about the law?—that sets so much store by the birth of a child, but does nothing to ensure that its life shall be one of health, and happiness, and opportunity? The law—that gives no thought to the future of child or mother, but insists that having conceived, you shall reproduce, whatever the circumstances? The law—that consistently penalises the child through the parent, and the parent through the child? The law—which considers that the only way to cure one evil is by heaping another on top of it!

For ten years or more, Rose Timson, you've been breaking the law. You've saved children coming into a world that would give them a rotten time. You've given people a chance to make new lives for themselves, instead of carrying the past like a millstone round their necks. You've risked your reputation—even your freedom—for the sake of poor devils that got themselves into a jam, and had no one but you to help them out of it. You've brought comfort and hope and peace to hundreds of homes. You've seen boys and girls happily

married, instead of hounded out of society. You've saved ~~my~~ pride, and prevented heredity playing hell with the new generation. And for all this you'd be doing time, if the law had happened to lay its hands on you. All this is sin, according to the law—and according to religion, if you happen to lay any store by that!

It's sin to have a child by somebody who can't marry you. It's sin to leave an unwanted baby in a railway coach. The very act of begetting a child is sin, according to the Bible! But neither the Bible nor the law call it sin to bring a child into the world of parents who don't want it, and who are not prepared to make all the sacrifice and effort that raising a child means. The law's down on you from every angle, unless you live the life of a eunuch; and if you do, there's the government, screaming at you about keeping up the birth rate! It will be time enough to talk about the birth-rate when the public's civilised out of its present view towards unmarried mothers and children born out of wedlock. When you can promise every child that's born a fair chance of making good in the world and in society—that'll be the time to start prosecuting the handful of people that have got the guts to defy the law for the sake of humanity.

Hold on . . . Was it all for humanity?

And if it was not—one Rose Timson angrily defied the other—hadn't I to indemnify myself for the risks I was taking?—risks that involved, not only myself, but Katie and Jo? Hadn't I got to make them safe, in case anything happened? Isn't money safety—the only kind of safety I could have left them, if the law had caught me out?

As it happens, I'm caught out in a different way. This thing has happened to Jo. My Jo. Of course I can help her. . . .

I *can't*.

Out of the hundreds I have helped, I can't help my own child, because I can't let her know I'm—that word they give to people who do what I'm doing; the word that's meant to frighten them, and make it all mean and ugly—the way she'll find it if she goes to the address they've given her, down Shaftesbury Avenue.

Just now and again, when I've been tired, or depressed, it's stuck me to wonder what I'd do, if one of the girls . . . but it seemed nonsense. If it had been either of them, it might

have been Katie. I'd have banked on Jo. Even now, it seems as if it can't be true. For God's sake, Katie, take that look off your face. What do you expect me to do? I can't. I tell you, I can't! I can't do it for Jo . . . at least, I'd be afraid to. All those hundreds of times, and not one mishap. Yet I know, if I were to lay my hands on Jo, something would go wrong. I suppose this is my punishment.

God is punishing me. But why? I've done no wrong. I've disobeyed the laws of man—not the laws of God, which are—"Do unto others. . . . Love your neighbour . . ." Maybe I'm being punished because I took money for it. But we'd got to live! *Mother, we'd got to live!*

Mother. I couldn't have told you this in the old days. I don't believe you'd have known what I was talking about. But perhaps it's different now, since you've died and gone to heaven! Yes, I bet, if there's a heaven, you're there; but if you've got anything to do with it, there'll be no "glassy seas" or "golden stairs"! There'll be good English walnut, with a shine on it you can put your cap straight at—queer, how I'd forgotten, until just now, about those lace caps you used to wear, with narrow lavender ribbon bunched in under the folds. And there'll be geranium beds and cherry pie, and grass like green plush, and a meadow with cowslips for the children to gather. You understand, don't you, about my wanting the children to have all the things like those? You'd got Father to help you; I had nobody—unless I'd married George. Well, perhaps I ought to have done. But when you've had one man go bad on you, you don't feel much like risking another. You were right about Harry, Mother, and I wish I'd had the sense to see it at the time.

Mother, for God's sake tell me what to do about Jo. It's not a little housemaid this time; it's your own grandchild, Josephine Timson. You'd love Jo. There's a lot of Father about her. Well—that's good enough for you, isn't it?

"You see, I . . . m'm? Mother! You're not there—after, all? All . . . right . . . of course! Silly of me. Of course you wouldn't understand. How should you? This sort of thing never came in the way of your sheltered life at Crowle. I'm sorry if I scared or upset you. It's all right; I'll make out somehow, by myself.

But, how? If the law doesn't get you, you're caught other
"Yes, Rose, you're caught, good and proper, this time.
Where's Jo?"

"I promised I wouldn't tell you."

"Don't be silly. What else have you come here for?"

There was a flicker of triumph in her faint smile, as she picked up the hat she had but recently discarded. It was long since she had known that positive domination which made her, a short woman, spiritually look down upon the tall Kay as she rose to her feet. "All right, Katie. I'm going to look after this." I've been afraid of her for years—no, not afraid, she corrected herself. It was just the silly sort of deference I had for Harry, in the beginning: because she's got all the education and manners and accomplishments I don't know much about. The things I gave her—in place of what she needed! Poor Katie. Under all that style and make-up, she's only a gawky kid. I've *failed* with Katie. . . .

"Are you going to try and fetch her home, Mummy? Because I doubt if you'll succeed. She's so ashamed. You see—it's begun to show."

"What of it? Good God, if a woman's got to be ashamed carrying a child——!" She broke off, aghast at the implication of her own words.

She was confusedly aware of Kay's accompanying her to the door, of pressing the lift button, of sinking in the dim, blue-lit little cage and emerging into the even dimmer hall. Mechanically she felt for her torch and switched it on the flight of steps that led to the street.

"It's utterly black! Would you like me to come with you?"

"No. Go back. Susan will be in any moment."

She groped into Knightsbridge, and the Alert went as she waited on the pavement for a taxi. The one that drew up at the kerb seemed as old and dilapidated as its driver.

"Do you mind driving in a raid?"

"Lord love yer, mum, us old sweats don't pay any attention to Jerry; it's the young 'uns as gets the wind up," the old man told her contemptuously. Rose gave him the address and got in.

They had hardly reached Park Lane when the guns opened

up. Two bombs came down. She sat, with an unconscious smile plastered on her face, watching the driver's solid shoulders. Every now and then the interior filled with gun-flash and a little shrapnel spattered on the roof of the cab. A red glow appeared ahead of them. The old man pushed the window back to say laconically, "'Ampstead way." Rose nodded. She was going 'Ampstead way herself.

There was a man in Marylebone who had got a good reputation, and Pixie Carpenter had scribbled a telephone number on a card—if she could lay her hands on it. Could one risk either? She knew their methods—which all the professional in her condemned; yet, so far as she had heard, they had had no failures. On her knees, her strong, blunt hands moved restlessly, and suddenly she knew, like Prospero, their magic was ended. As soon, of course, as she had examined Jo, she would know if there was any chance. . . . And suppose there was not?

They would be all right, of course—the three, or perhaps the four, of them; not well off—not in the Brockett class any more, but able to manage without skimping. All the money she had sent out of the country—that must be written off, or the greater part of it. The American end might recover in time, but one must not count on it. But the house property was safe, and the one or two small investments she had made in British industries; worthless at present, these would begin to show their returns a few years after the war was ended. And Avenue House; when they were able to start up again in London, it might still represent one of her best securities. Just a few meagre years . . . What are you haggling about? she asked herself fiercely. If all goes well—she did not stop to analyse the ambiguity—you'll work on, as you intended, to the end of the war, and then retire in comfort, to enjoy whatever the government's left you of your gains!

The ancient taxi was groaning up what she guessed to be Haverstock Hill. Presently it stopped; the man got down and opened the door. The sky was laced with searchlights and tracer, the hum of enemy aircraft heavy overhead. She pushed a pound note into his hand, felt with her hand a rickety iron gate and groped her way through.

"'Jou want me to wait, mum?"

"No. I'd get under cover, if I were you." There was enough

from the sky to make out a flight of steps leading to a back porch. He stood indifferently by the gate.

"Better see if they're at 'ome. Most folks up 'ere 'as got one shelter 'abit."

"It's all right," said Rose, after a pause, in which the distant jangling of the bell echoed in a seemingly empty house. "I hear somebody coming."

Her words were lost in a gun salvo that shook the stones on which she stood; shrapnel sounded like hail on the shrubby trees below, and Rose was glad of the porch that at least protected her head.

The door opened grudgingly.

"Mummy . . ."

"Hallo, dear."

Again her voice was drowned in the roar of the guns from the Heath and Primrose Hill. Something screamed, plunged, and concussion, rocking the floor under their feet, brought a little glass tinkling from an unseen window. There was no light, as Rose had put out her torch. Jo said, in a constrained voice:

"You'd better take my hand. There's a light down in the basement."

"It's all right—I've got one, when you've closed the door. Are you by yourself?" asked Rose, as she followed Jo down some uneven stairs into an untidy basement, with the remains on the table of a haphazard meal.

"Looks like it. I've been asleep. I suppose the others have gone out."

"What others?"

"The people who live here," was Jo's evasive answer, as, reddening, she turned away from her mother's gaze.

The child looked heavy and round-shouldered in her crumpled tunic; her flushed face held already the faint thickening of pregnancy, her enlarged breasts strained against the khaki. She tried, by her hunched position, to conceal these changes, of which, Rose saw, she was so painfully aware. A deep, maternal tenderness, mingled with compunction, welled in Rose. Jo, who had always asked for so little, and now needed so much, called out for the first time her mother's passionate solicitude which had always gone to Kay. Jo, with knitted brows of resistance, saying reproachfully:

"You shouldn't have come out in the raid, Mummy. I shan't forgive Kay for telling you!"

"Pooh! I've been out every night in the last week." What to say next? How to break down the barrier, which Jo was evidently stubbornly prepared to maintain? "I suppose you don't happen to have such a thing as a cup of tea about you?"

"It's war-time Indian; awful muck." Jo slouched to perform the necessary actions. There was silence, except for the loud ticking of an alarm clock. Jo came from some inner, darkened region with a teapot in her hand and put it on the table, among the débris of the earlier meal, at which Rose cast an involuntary look of distaste.

"Who owns this joint, anyhow?" It was a relief to voice some of her dissatisfaction regarding the situation in which Jo had chosen to house herself.

"One of the girl's parents. You needn't bother your head, Mummy," said Jo suddenly, loudly. "Of course I know, in your position, you can't have anything of this sort happening."

"It seems to have happened." Rose could not restrain a wry smile.

"It's my business, and I'm seeing to it. I told Kay that. I don't know why she'd got to pass it on to you."

"What do you mean by 'seeing to it'?" asked Rose, in a level voice. Jo stared, gulped, mumbled something.

"Sit down," said Rose, very quietly. "Now, listen to me, Jo. Is that, really, what you want?"

"Wanting doesn't seem to come into the picture, does it?" There was a new, hard, bitterness in Jo's voice that stung Rose. She waited a moment before continuing, still on the same slow, level note.

"You've got to make up your mind. You either have this child, or you don't have it. I'm not here to persuade you either way; I only want to make sure you've thought the matter over from all sides, before you decide what you mean to do."

"I don't know why you bothered to come then. I told Kay. . . ."

"Never mind what you told Kay. You're four months pregnant. That's what you say. It looks to me as if you're more. That means your child is there: living, growing, feeding in you. If you destroy it, you're destroying life: life which you and another person have made together, in a moment

There was happiness for you both. You needn't tell me it wasn't, for there was no earthly reason for you to do it if the wish hadn't been there. This child of yours is the pledge of that moment of happiness, which perhaps won't come your way again. Anyhow, in your place I'd think twice about it. It's one of the things you can't go back on, after it's done."

"Do you think I've thought about anything else, since it happened?" Jo's voice was thick, her face averted.

"Well, there's another side to it. If you don't feel equal to seeing it through, to having a child that hasn't got a father, to facing up to people with a baby in your arms and no wedding ring on your finger—you'd better let it go."

"You talk," mumbled Jo, "as if I'd got nobody else but myself to consider. What about you? What about Kay? I know how you hate gossip, and—and I suppose some of the patients wouldn't much like it, if you—if I——"

"My dear child, don't talk balderdash. They can mind their own business, and I'll do the same. Besides," said Rose, with a deliberate carelessness, "I'm not going on with massage for ever. I'd meant to keep going until the end of the war, but there's no sign of that, and my old ticker's warning me to ~~go~~ ^{lie} up."

"You're just *saying* that," reproached Jo. "We all know you'd be bored to bits if you stopped work. Though I wish you would . . ."

"Leave my affairs alone and I'll leave yours alone," said Rose crisply. "I haven't come up to talk you into anything against your wishes. I just want you to know that, so far as I'm concerned, you're a free agent; so don't load anything on to me. You got yourself into this without asking me, and I expect you to get yourself out in the same way. That's all, my dear; except that I'll stand by you, whichever way you like to work it out."

A thought flashed into her mind: Jo, with her abounding health, her strong, deep-bosomed frame, her gaiety and loving kindness—what a mother she would make! Suppose I persuaded her to go through with it?—Oh, my God, what a prospect for us all! Think of bringing up a child in wartime, and all those nuisances—Katie was right—about registrations and food cards; no chance of keeping it quiet with servants and shopkeepers. And everybody thinking I was mad,

or I'd bungled it—for, of course, they'd never believe I hadn't. . . . For the love of heaven, let her stick to her decision. ~~That~~ Marylebone doctor will see her through—I can fix it to-morrow——

"Well, it sounds as if the raid's quietening down. You'd better get your things together."

"What for?" Jo raised her dark, blotched face.

"You're coming home with me, of course. We'll fix up the camp bed in my room."

"Please—I'd rather not, till it's over!" she pleaded.

Rose got up stiffly and laid her hand on the ruffled dark head. "Listen, dearie. We-aren't going to rush at this."

"Yes—it's all right—I've got it all fixed, for to-morrow."

Rose's heart gave a loud tick as Jo's arms were flung round her waist, Jo's head buried against her, while hard, gulping sobs dragged themselves from Jo's throat.

"Sh, sh, baby." Instinctively the old endearment came to Rose's lips, as she pressed the dark head closer. "We'll have a good night's sleep and make up our minds in the morning. Leave it to Mummy——"

"But I can't!" Jo cried desperately. "You've just said I must decide for myself! I *had* decided—but, somehow, it's a—^{as} got upset again. And I'm so tired of thinking! I only know I want my baby—so muth——"

The movement of Rose's hand on her daughter's hair ceased suddenly. A curious, stoical calm had descended on her, out of which, presently, she spoke.

"It all amounts to this, Jo: what have you got in *yourself* that can make up to a child for having no name of its own, and, as things are shaping nowadays, a pretty poor chance of making good in whatever sort of a world they leave us, after the war?"

The words fell into silence—Jo had stopped sobbing—with a curious significance. Even to Rose, it seemed as though they had been spoken, not by, but through her. She waited for Jo's reply. It came at last, gruff and doubtful.

"I suppose *love* isn't enough?"

Rose heard herself gasp. She heard the same strange, unowned voice speak through her lips.

". . . I dare say we could make it enough, between us."

She could not see, for her glasses were misted, and the eyes

behind them swimming in tears. Why, you're crying—you fool of a Rose Timson! You're doing the very thing you've scoffed at other people for doing—thinking nobody but them ever had a grandchild before! You're just as soft as the rest—softer; because here you are, getting yourself all worked up about a little by-blow any decent mother would be feeling just as bad as she could about. Your daughter, Rose Timson, is going to have an illegitimate baby, and instead of being upset about it, you're standing here with an idiotic smile—I can feel it—wreathed over your face. Why aren't you ashamed of yourself? But there; whatever you've pretended, you've never had any morals—at least, not the sort people pride themselves about; so you may as well admit it, if only to yourself. And whatever you and life between you have made of poor Katie, Jo's pure gold. . . .

Another bomb came down, the light went out, and she heard herself laughing, as she reached for Jo's hand in the dark. The hand she found was as warm and steady as her own. Why, she thought happily, Jo's as healthy as a young mare! Perhaps it will be a boy. It's time we had a man about the house.

THE END

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